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**The Historical Formation of Modernity in Korea:  
Events, Issues and Actors**

**by**

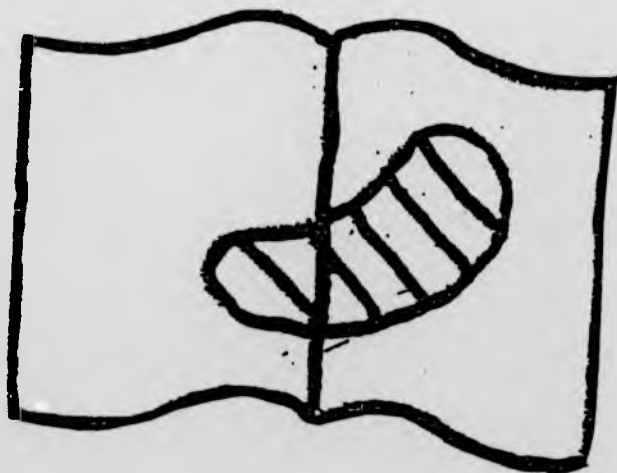
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of Warwick, Department of Sociology

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## Notes on the Romanization of written-Korean

The Korean government's announcement of a revised system for the romanization of Korean in 2000 provoked a heated debate among academics in Korean Studies as well as in the attentive public. The official revisions are instigated in order to facilitate better applicability for the information age, abandoning some breves and the apostrophe for computer users and reminding users of romanized Korean of the exact phonetic sounds of Korean. In fact, some important differences in pronunciation pertaining to the old system could not be properly identified. Korean has ten simple vowels and eleven diphthongs, for example. Moreover, due to a significant difference in orthography and reading many consonants in pronunciation are quite often confused. Critics, including Koreans and the foreign community, however, have worried about a serious incompatibility of the new system after English pronunciation.[\*]

The basic principles of the new romanization system are, firstly, that romanization is based on standard Korean pronunciation; secondly, symbols other than roman letters are avoided as far as possible. The third principle, that to write Korean in a romanization that pays heed to pronunciation, however, has two exceptions, which must be fully taken into account. Firstly, that family names, which have been widely used under the old systems, and social customs, could be used 'for the time being' until a further decision is taken. Secondly, and of more serious import, for the academic purpose of converting romanized Korean back to Hangeul (Written Korean), 'romanization is done according to Hangeul spelling and not pronunciation'. For this, a hyphen may be additionally used when it is necessary to distinguish between syllables. This has major ramifications for

this thesis, in that bibliographical information covering Korean literature becomes very difficult to read for those readers who do not have proper knowledge of Korean and the revised romanization system, even though the new system, I believe, would be better for finding Korean literature in any comprehensive library research, generating less confusion.

The first decision I made, therefore, was to translate bibliographical information on Korean literature into English, immediately followed by the original Korean without romanization. This appeared to be the most effective and accurate mode of providing a bibliography. Translations from Korean titles are mine, except in those rare cases where the authors provide their own. Consequently, any mistakes or problems found in translation will be due mainly to my lack of competence. The second decision concerns the introduction of authors' names in the text. The authors' names in the Korean, Chinese and Japanese original are written with the surnames first, in order to minimize confusion for readers, faced with a lack of consensus on this matter concerning academic publication. Provision of quotations is suffixed by the authors' surname and first name together in order, due to the possibility that different authors with the same surnames - KIM Seung-Kuk, KIM Sunhyuk, KIM Se-Kyun, for example - could be variously introduced in a single paragraph. In order to avoid further confusion, surnames given with first names, are written with capital letters, regardless of their origin: for example, AHN Jee-Won, Perry ANDERSON, Karl-Otto APEL. Lastly, the matter of hyphen-use. In general, the first names in Korean and Chinese are made of two distinctive parts, normally reflected by a hyphen in romanization. However, there seems to be no fixed rule, so that each author has his/her own preference for romanization and this in one or four ways: for example, Gil-Dong,

Gil-dong, Gildong, Gil Dong. I generalize these usages as Gil-Dong, which seems more widely used than its counterparts. However, this is only for that Korean literature in which there is no contra-indication for an author's preference.

[\*] for the overall understanding of the debate, see

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## Summary

This thesis aims to provide a view point from which we can understand the long-term historical transformations of Korean politics since the late fourteenth century. I will attempt to illustrate the overall configuration of Korean politics with sociological reference to three questions: what kinds of political events have occurred? Which political issues have led to the participation of major political actors? How have these actors shown their political orientation in practice and how have events and actors determined politics, or, if there is no determination, how have they influenced the overall shape of politics?

The concept of modernity in this thesis is mainly used to indicate the embodiment of political actors' alternative visions without necessarily accepting the widely acknowledged assumption that modernity is the epochal quality of the contemporary period which exclusively enjoy. Some sociologists, especially in comparative-historical sociology, since the late 1990s have shown their intellectual interest in conceptualizing 'multiple modernities'. They recognize the importance of theorizing the existence of plural forms of societal development for the contemporary situation, while some classical ideas on modernity based on the European or American experience have been critically evaluated in regional studies.

If the Korean experience is regarded as an example of multiple modernities, it is not because the political boundary itself – which has been called Korea, as well as Chosun, Koryo, Balhae/Shilla, etc. –, has its own distinctive political and cultural color. Rather it is because the actors in Korean history generally, have shown themselves to be a good example for evaluating modernity. Regardless of quite different historical trajectories, the compatibility of the Korean experience with others under the title of multiple modernities, can be adduced both from the way in which human practices have emerged in their collective form, with their own political orientations, and in the relationship to other actors within a boundary.

## Introduction: theorizing modernity in comparative-historical sociology

### 1. Modernity and historical sociology in Korean context

This thesis aims to provide a view point from which we can understand the long-term historical transformations of Korean politics since the late fourteenth century. I will attempt to illustrate the overall configuration of Korean politics with sociological reference to three questions: what kinds of political events have occurred? Which political issues have led to the participation of major political actors? How have these actors shown their political orientation in practice and how have events and actors determined politics, or, if there is no determination, how have they influenced the overall shape of politics? The need to extend the range of historical inquiry beyond the so-called modern age to the late fourteenth century - the historical period of the emerging Chosun, the new nation-state in Korean history - derives from an initial belief that modern Korean history and the ways in which modern political actors act, could not be properly understood without comparing them to past socio-political issues and events as their precursors. The attempt to theorize modern Korean politics without considering the precedent seems quite problematic, in that any conceptual tools utilized for identifying particular aspects of modern politics that ignore the historical factors contributing to empirical realization of these conceptual frameworks, would obviously appear to be deficient.

There have been a number of works on Korean politics, focusing on the meanings of major events. However, most fail to provide a theoretical account for a grand picture of the dynamics of Korean politics, although some plausible clues for theorization are often suggested. In addition, by



neglecting the careful consideration of the history of Korean politics, many works produced a limited explanation, due to the lack of a comparative investigation of contemporary politics with its traditional counterpart. Such narrow research foci mean that some works have even failed to anticipate the actual direction of short-term political transformations in contemporary Korea. My investigation of the long-term historical transformation of Korean politics and the Korean community invokes a fundamental question: are there continuous elements in Korean politics over the long run? If yes, then what are the underpinning factors for maintaining such a continuity? If no, then how are we to understand the political ruptures and the changes in major political actors in sociological terms?

Answers to this question cannot be found merely in the objective domain; in the observation of historical events and political actors' ideas and practices. Rather, they are dependent on the intellectual attitude which intends to identify some theoretical implications from history. In the practical decision, in which some events are introduced for interpretation and others are excluded, i.e., the impossibility of including all events and actors in a written account, linking an event and an actor already intimates the path of the theory aimed at. What I intend here, however, is to provide the theoretical pre-condition for comparing political actors in specific situations, in terms of identifying the modes of political activities by political actors.<sup>1</sup> Firstly, and toward this purpose, the interpretation of major events will be understood as political products of actors, rather than as derivation of a meta-historical economic law, or sudden contingent gifts from the grand dynamics of history itself. This means that political processes will be the focus rather than concentrating on the background of

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1) See conceptual excursus 1 at the end of this introduction.

the events undermined by any deterministic attitude. Secondly, in evaluating the meanings of events and actors, I will try to minimize the gap between different conceptualizations, from the highly loaded modernist idea of traditional society and the traditional political system, on the one hand, to the revisionist idea of extending modernity into the traditional world, on the other. In the latter perspective, tradition becomes the prototype of the modern, while the former treats modernity as rootless.

While many debates and their discursive examination in Korean studies are introduced in this thesis, their limited theoretical natures are mainly highlighted, rather than suggesting any alternative to them. In fact, constructing an alternative conceptual framework for understanding Korean politics is neither intended, nor within the author's competence. Above all, the acknowledgement of the limited nature of this thesis comes from a realistic recognition, in the author's own view, that without systematically comparing the Korean experience with its counterparts - which are barely focused upon here -, Korean politics can never fully be grasped.<sup>2</sup> The basic intention of the thesis is to reinterpret some of the major political issues in terms of their sociological import, which has been more or less neglected, despite having been widely dealt with in Korean studies.

The overriding importance of conceptualizing modernity will here be supported by a brief review of the development of Korean studies in the social sciences and the ramifications of the major social scientific discourses adopted therein. It goes without saying that the political and economic reasoning adopted by major modern political actors in their political discourses has been shaped by their interpretations of 'modernity'

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2) See conceptual excursus 2 at the end of this introduction.

and 'modernization', both of which are seen as the destination for societal changes, or the major tool for achieving societal development. Sociology, as a modern academic discipline for the Korean situation, has produced many intellectual works on modern Korea and its transformative periods since the late nineteenth century and the colonial period (1910-1945) (Park and Chang, 1999). However, it soon becomes apparent that macro historical theorizing in the sociological fields with regard to the long-term political transformation of Korea, is impoverished when compared to other disciplines dealing with historical resources.<sup>3</sup> Despite the existence of many sociologically-inspired works on specific political thinkers on the overall social hierarchy in the traditional political system and the overwhelming influence of Neo-Confucian state ideology on the activities of members of Chosun society, the sociological understanding of traditional society and the state, especially Chosun, could hardly progress beyond the forms of snapshot knowledge and has seldom been developed in a broad theoretical framework. Insofar as there are big gaps between the traditional type of societal and political model, on the one hand, and the newly introduced

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3) To take one example, two publication databases in the social sciences, *international bibliography of the social sciences*, *sociological abstracts*, which mainly cite English publications, hardly include any books or articles dealing with the long-term historical transformation of Korean society and its politics. This situation also pertains to Korean sociology, although it is noticeable that in some recent works here, we find examples of the political, cultural and intellectual particularities of traditional Korea broadly compared with the European experience. However, in many instances, this new historical approach is linked to a strong relativist idea of culture and cosmology, rather than connecting the Korean experience with others in order to develop a more general political and social theory.

modern alternatives, on the other, the conceptual rupture in sociological theorizing is too wide to be ignored. One reason for this intellectual phenomenon may derive from the difficulty that scholars in Korean studies face, in light of the difficult historical trajectory of Korean society, compared to the European and North-American experience, that 'textbook' of modernity.

However, it will here be mooted that modern Korean society and its traditional counterpart should be interpreted within a broad interpretative framework, rather than treated with different methodological tools and perspectives. As I mentioned at the beginning, it is only when we place them together under the grand historical view, that the correct interpretation of current contemporary Korean politics and its societal features can be fully achieved. Paradoxically, it is only through the reconceptualization of modernity from the comparative-historical perspective, that this task can be effected. Although there are many different takes on modernity, at least one shared element is visible: the contemporary *problematique* occupies the central place for intellectual inquiry. In other words, understanding modernity becomes itself the way of interpreting the agendas of the contemporary world, in order to produce better solutions for socio-political and economic problems.

The dominant way of dealing with modernity for this purpose in the social sciences and philosophy seems to have been to set up an epochal relationship between the contemporary world and its counterparts - in most cases, the past. As far as one seriously concentrates on the issues of one's own historical time and interprets them under an epochal consciousness, the rupture between different conceptualizations of historical times becomes

unavoidable. In spite of the fact that intellectuals and political actors normally treat others' interpretations and political practices with less weight - especially in dealing with the history of ideas and political history -, such a process, regarding either the contemporary world, or for previous periods, is deeply related to suggesting their own alternative.

## **2. Disputes on the conceptions of modernity**

The concept of modernity in this thesis is mainly used to indicate the embodiment of political actors' alternative visions without necessarily accepting the widely acknowledged assumption that modernity is the epochal quality of the contemporary period which we exclusively enjoy. Needless to say, defining a concept - what modernity means -, for which arguments could be clearly put forward, is a basic part of the intellectual project- on modernity, for example. However, while any intellectual project could not go beyond the conditions of its particular historical time in which the author develops their ideas, the definition of the concept itself is composed of the words of non-temporal meanings, on the one hand, and orients itself toward a general explanation of the meanings, with the resultant implication for several situations which are temporal and particular, on the other. Although the author and her/his socio-political resources - which contribute to the construction of conceptions and their related intellectual circulation -, are historically situated in a specific time, the linguistic expression of the definitions of a concept in the social sciences and political philosophy has been quite de-historical in terms of its relative freedom from time-based limitation. Consequently, a concept could have additional meanings for readers, beyond the author's initial intention to define it in a particular situation, when it is reinterpreted in a different temporal setting (Frieze, 1998).

However, it becomes apparent that many social scientists conceptualize modernity in time-bounded perception, which limits modernity to a particular historical milieu. Anthony GIDDENS, for example, defines modernity thus:

'In this book [*Modernity and Self-Identity*] I use the term 'modernity' in a very general sense, to refer to the institutions and modes of behaviour established first of all in post-feudal Europe, but which in the twentieth century increasingly have become world-historical in their impact. 'Modernity' can be understood as roughly equivalent to 'the industrialised world', so long as it be recognized that industrialism is not its only institutional dimension.' (1991: 14-15)

'What is modernity? As a first approximation, let us simply say the following: "modernity" refers to modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence. This associates modernity with a time period and with an initial geographical location, but for the moment leaves its major characteristics safely stowed away in a black box.' (1990: 1)

Whereas the purpose of defining modernity is to distinctively construct its conceptual space in order to clearly show more fruitful meanings of it, the historicized definition does not fully allow its abstract meanings - even though one could argue that all meanings are abstract - to be understood in its diversity. It becomes impossible - and this for Giddens's understanding especially - to apply modernity to multiple historical times. Ever since particular historical origins and particular institutional contents came to embody the core meanings of modernity (for example, see Toulmin, 1990), modernity has become the concept for evaluating different historical periods and different institutional settings. In becoming such, however, modernity has been exclusively limited to a particular historical period, with fixes its meaning. Illustrating non-European modernities as deviations, or the suggestion of them as alternatives by some comparative social scientists, fails to evade this problem, which emanates from the assumption that the core of European modernity was already given and its

forms and contents are already fixed in history - such discourses viz., the Korean case are introduced in chapter 2.

Above of all, the problem of the historical definition of modernity - a temporal one - does not seem to be critically appraised by many social scientists alongside of intellectual interests in the institutional development of politics since the French revolution, on the one hand, and the research methods dealing with epochal characteristics as a whole, on the other, which have deeply influenced comparative-historical sociology. For example, a mixed type of both the evolutionist idea and the chronology-oriented categorization in theorizing modernity, is not able to suggest any new political project without dividing the epochal perception of modernity into several stages. The periodization of modernity, a way of making several modernities in a sense, by Alain TOURAINE (1997) - *haute, moyenne et basse modernités* - ultimately neglects the tension between different epochal perceptions for competing actors and implicitly constructs the genuine view of the periods for the symbolized 'modern' subject. Treating a period in this manner, by distinguishing it from other periods under the big epochal umbrella of the modern era, reveals the conceptual rupture between the modern era and its counterparts, which cannot be bridged by a reconstruction of epochal perception or through the radical rejection of an epochal understanding of history. If the institutional form of modernity is limited to that of the nation-state and modernity is understood as the era of nation-states, one could raise a question as to how the emerging Pan-European state could be understood. As the second stage of political modernity? Or the rise of a post-modern political project? The current process of European integration in relation to the conceptual question of modernity, will be investigated in chapter 6.

In fact, the history of the social sciences shows that an epochal consciousness was deeply rooted in intellectual projects, many of which were actively engaged in political transformation. Contemporary historical sociologists in the theory of modernity, in many respects, represent the succession to this tradition: the reinterpretation of European intellectual history on the eve of the era of the nation-state and on the further process of nation-building, in order to grasp valuable lessons for current European integration process (Wagner); the proposal to reconceptualize global history beyond the functionalist and narrow-minded imperialist view (Wittrock); the critical appraisals of 'the clash of civilizations' and of the 'end of history' in terms of the exhaustion of new proposals for modernization and suggesting a perspective on multiple modernities (Eisenstadt), for example. However, many intellectual projects for the conceptualization of modernity accept time - and space-oriented categories in developing their comparative analyses. In so doing, they become overdependent on the construction of conceptual equivalents and counterparts to be compared, which could lead to the asymmetric interpretations matched with particular normative claims. In spite of the fact that conceptualization of historical facts has been the very purpose of comparative-historical sociology, many sociologists, from time to time, ignore the historical fact that the meanings of these concepts are historical products, pragmatically introduced in order to clearly indicate certain distinctive features of particular phenomena. Modernity, for example, which has become one of the major concepts in the social sciences and political philosophy, has its own conceptual history which shows that it was loosely defined by intellectuals in order to describe their contemporary agendas, rather than seriously defined in the de-historicized abstraction. To begin with, let us assume that the historical origin of modernity began at



around the eighteenth or nineteenth century. For the assumption to have validity, it should illuminate the connection between its historical and linguistic origin. 'The word "modernus" was first used in the late fifth century to distinguish what had become a "Christian" present from a "pagan" Roman past' (Jauss, 1970:11 cited in Habermas, 2001: 131). In the writings of a religious school of the twelfth and thirteenth century, the words "modernorum, moderni(s)" were used as a comparative; as a way of distinguishing from 'the ancient'.<sup>4</sup> In *The Prince*, also, Machiavelli subtly but clearly, used own 'modern' for indicating the political and administrative agendas of his time (i.e., the beginning of the 16th century).<sup>5</sup> In the English world, the first recorded use of the word 'modern' is in 1585, and 'modernists' in 1588; 'modernity' in 1627, and 'modernism', 'modernness', 'modernizer', 'modernize', are all in use by the first half of the eighteenth century (King, 1995: 108). The conceptual shift from these loose meanings here to more concrete and sharply defined usages for exclusively describing the grand historical transformation since the nineteenth century, coincided with this historical transformation (Koselleck, 1985). In other words, the common idea of modernity indicating particular epochal phenomena in this social sciences itself could be understood as a part of this particular epochal phenomena.

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4) As an example: "Nec dedignatus sum modernorum proferre sententias quos antiquis in plerisque praeferre non dubito" (Jean de Salisbury, 1159/1929: 3-4 quoted in Jeauneau, 1973: 57) and "Licet itaque modernorum et veterum sit sensus idem, venerabilior est vetustas" (p.136 quoted in p.56).

5) "una lunga esperienza delle cose moderne e una continua lezione delle antique" (1992: 257) and "quegli esempi che dalle cose antiche e moderne" (290).

### ***2.1. Actors and boundary: subjectification of modernity***

One of the common conceptions of modernity is that modernity is understood on a rupture; one which historically differentiates it from counter-categories, viz., the pre-modern, traditional, or even the post-modern. When the influences of the grand socio-political and economic transformation around the 1800s fundamentally shaped the way of the social sciences and political philosophy, the overwhelming intellectual interpretations of these transformations produced, in most cases the perception of epochal differentiations for human history. Regrettably, while the founding fathers in the social sciences tried to respond to these changes with their own interpretations, many of them were led to suggest also the idea of historical progress for explaining the detachment from the past. Once they had formulated their own views of history and had identified the grand transformations, they tended to explain the sources of the modern take-off through cross-national European comparisons, as well as in inter-civilizational terms also. These intellectual expansions into the global realm may have been necessary for them to more clearly identify what they observed for their own periods.

The identification of the emerging new world was conditioned by an understanding of a new human agency. In fact, studies on political and economic transformation in the 19th century always include the explanation of modern actors as the driving force of transformation. In so far as historical research was limited to the European experience, the political tension among human agents was always there to be explained. The history of Marxian ideas, for example, clearly shows how important the role of the modern actor was for intellectual inquiry. However, when classical

sociologists tried to explain the emergence of new actors in terms of the historical process, they had to implicitly and explicitly accept the assumption that Europe, as the boundary of interaction for European actors, is distinguished from other regions. In fact, this appeared the only plausible way to genealogically explain the emergence of new actors replacing old powerful classes in the (West) European context. However, the problem with this comparative idea was that its proponents could not account for what they observed- in terms of the tension that existed between modern actors- when they proceeded to cross-boundary research between Europe and others. While the existence of political and economic actors differentiated along the line of economic interests has become the essential assumption of theories of capitalism, the participation in common cultural heritages from the past has been presupposed in theories of boundary politics. The existence of diverse actors within a given boundary became less important for comparative-historical works. Rather, it was the boundary itself that came to have its own meaning as the place providing overarching resources for each actor. From here, it was one small step to construct a totalized symbolic actor for representing the boundary. The development of the nation-state system, nationalism and wars among states in Europe would be a good example of this process.<sup>6</sup> In other words, comparison itself includes the conceptual expansion of subjectivity, from particular economic and political interests, to a broader conception of 'cultural heritage'.

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6) For Lyotard, the universal claim for local legitimacy in the nationalist idea means to degrade humanity to a second level below that of the nation-state: '... a universal import: 'We, the French people'. ... As the current slogan of the far right in France has it: *French first* (which implies that freedom comes second).' (1989: 322) (Italics by the author))

Apart from the asymmetric formulation between modernity and its historical counterparts, the comparative understanding of modernity in a number of cases displays the irony that, whereas the subjectivity of modernity is never clearly mentioned within one collective boundary, it is firmly presupposed in comparative analyses among several bounded entities. The big macro terms - religions, civilizations, regions for example, - which are quite common for regional studies in modernity, seem to have an autonomy of conceptual power for regrouping actors. For many social scientists and even philosophers, the boundary is understood as the container of different characteristics which provides meaning for any comparison with others. Under the immediate perception of the existence of several religious, cultural and political boundaries, which have existed and been practically utilized over a long period of time, many intellectual works have neglected the potential danger of configuring rigid boundaries, which become actual when the assumption is transformed into the factual premise for comparative research. When scholars implicitly conclude that the boundary exists, not as the situational theatre, but as the disciplinary space to teach conventional historical wisdom to members within the political and cultural boundary, ultimately they cannot avoid a deterministic interpretation of human practices.

To depend on the power of the boundary, while assuming that it is filled with specific characteristics, enables historical sociologists to operate with the strong assumption that the subject of the given boundary lasts as long as the boundary itself. The assumption of the long-term existence of representative subjects of boundaries over several historical periods conceptually occurs when qualified, either positively or negatively, by

cultural backgrounds that are deeply and exclusively involved in the process of the identity formation of members of the boundary.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, whenever the reclassification of human practices within the grand categories related to boundaries is effected in comparative-historical analysis, sociologists as participants in the public sphere, irreducibly contribute to the maintenance of political actors' immediate perception of the rigidity of boundary politics.

The problem of that subjectification in theorizing modernity can also be identified in that conventional sociological method - still influential in the field - through which the totalized view of long-term historical process is implicitly constructed. While the boundary - cultural or political - is at the centre of research interests, some sociologists do not proceed to further investigate whether or not the historical characteristics they observe are fully shared by every individual and collective actor within the boundary. Even though human practices at the micro level cannot be fully dealt with by macro historical analysis, the macro description of the overall view covering the boundary always contains a risk of constructing a totalized subject, or representatively symbolizing a few subjects in historical analysis. In fact, even if we accept this as an objective view of history, a way not only of linking the past to the present, but also of relocating and reviving

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7) When he investigates the history of table manners and eating cultures for the upper classes in the West since the Middle Ages, Elias rather cynically reveals the dilemma behind the subjective idea of 'we' over several historical periods: 'It is sometimes said, "How far we have progressed beyond this standard", although it is not usually quite clear who is the 'we' with whom the speaker identifies on such occasions, as if he or she deserved part of the credit.' (2000: 59)

the past for the contemporary agenda, such a position leads inexorably to a subjective idea of history, a representative view of the contemporary on the past.

### ***2.2. The moment of recognizing the historical time***

How many different perceptions of time exist in modernity? This question has been rarely broached and then only indirectly answered as the form of assumption underpinning a manner of arguing distinctive qualities for modernity, compared to its counterparts. While it is argued that time and space in modernity is differently perceived by individuals and quite differently conceived in actual practices, compared to those in traditional and premodern times (Giddens: 1990), the presupposition of one authentic perception of modernity as a grand time-zone remains, implicitly assuming an objective time shared by peoples.<sup>8</sup>

While the scholarly recognition of modernity itself necessitates a historical explanation of its origin, developmental process and long-term transformation, many historical analyses do not clearly acknowledge the fact that the conceptual transformation of modernity has implicitly occurred in the process of explaining these changes. Two characteristics are observable: a flourishing epochal consciousness in the way of exclusively concentrating on the contemporary historical agendas and an emphasis on the implications of historical agendas for 'History'.

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8) Friese clearly shows that some major sociologists in structuralism and functionalism fail to recognize the existence of plural perceptions of time by diverse subjects when they try to interpret socio-political agendas within the framework of societal time by means of an objectivist attitude. See, Friese (1997).

Treating an epoch as a whole, and identifying the comparative characteristics of an epoch, have been the common characteristic of historical analyses for the social sciences and philosophy. Distantiation from the past and a newly distinctive embedded quality of contemporary agendas in human history have been basic intellectual attitudes (Habermas, 2001). Under the influence of an increased epochal consciousness of intellectuals around 1800, which paved the development of social science and philosophy, classical comparative-historical sociology became accustomed to dealing with epochal categories. Despite the fact that historical analysis has discovered, from the long-term configuration of societal movements, crucial elements for understanding contemporary features, many works still operated under the assumption that it was the epochs themselves that provided different qualities for human lives. The manipulation of epochal differences was very important for drawing the characteristics of one's own historical situation in several ways. However, the asymmetric distribution of values in the highlighting of contemporary agendas was an implicit attitude, even though the grand shape of epochal qualities was a simple by-product in the process of arguing the necessity of new political agendas.

The construction of different epochal qualities went together with the strong idea of history in the mixed form of teleological and evolutionist thinking.<sup>9</sup>

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9) While Sewell's exemplary critique of Wallerstein and Tilly as trapped in 'teleological temporality' highlights how their views on History seriously influence their research on the history of capitalism with the world-system theory, for Wallerstein's case, and on comparative analysis of some French actors' different involvements in the French revolution, for Tilly, in some aspects the evolutionist attitude is also identified within their rigid

The conceptions of history in the evolutionist/teleological idea have not been entirely excluded from the sociological theory of modernity and its loose form is still quite apparent. An increased interpretative capacity that could evaluate one's own contemporary agenda within history, was combined with the imagery of the desirable future, couched in a normative basis. Even though one could correctly argue that the problem-solving process is always connected to the actors' own normative foundation, there is yet no reason to presuppose the final destination for the normative journey and no need to evaluate each short journey as work in progress toward this end. In other words, fidelity to contemporary agendas does not necessarily come from meta-historical tasks. Individual actors' radicalized historical awareness of their own projects, which encourages their subsequent practice, in many cases is based on their own subjective perception of history, which, it is not doubted, is expressive of their authentic Subjectivity. Modernity becomes subjective through the practical visions of actors and their realization in practice.

### **3. Multiple modernities in comparative-historical sociology**

Whereas some philosophers still inquire about the conception of modernity, on the presupposition that modernity is a legitimate topic for philosophy (Habermas, 2001: 130, 1987), some sociologists, especially in comparative-historical sociology, since the late 1990s have shown their intellectual interest in conceptualizing 'multiple modernities'. They recognize the importance of theorizing the existence of plural forms of societal development for the contemporary situation, while some classical ideas on modernity based on the European or American experience have been critically evaluated in regional studies.

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construction of long-term historical process. See, Sewell (1996).



'The notion of "multiple modernities" denotes a certain view of the contemporary world - indeed of the history and characteristics of the modern era - that goes against the views long prevalent in scholarly and general discourses. It goes against the view of the "classical" theories of modernization and of the convergence of industrial societies prevalent in the 1950s, and indeed against the classical sociological analyses of Marx, Durkheim, and (to a large extent) even of Weber, at least in one reading of his work. They all assumed, even if only implicitly, that the cultural program of modernity as it developed in modern Europe and the basic institutional constellations that emerged there would ultimately take over in all modernizing and modern societies; with the expansion of modernity, they would prevail throughout the world.' (Eisenstadt, 2000b: 1).

In Japanese Studies, for example, scholars have raised questions concerning the contribution of a pre-modern Japanese heritage to the modernization process, in order to explain Japan's rather exceptional performance in world politics and its economic growth. Eisenstadt (1996b), in particular, highlights Japanese culture as continuously developing civilizational heritages from outside, and modifying them for its own purpose. Arnason, more broadly, introduces civilizational heritages in the sociological theorizing of several political projects of modernity, including the Russian communist one (Arnason, 2000, 1999, 1998 and his additional explanation on Byzantium, 2000a). At the same time, extended inquiries on non-West European historical paths to modernity and a broad reinterpretation of the historical development of the European and American experience, have produced a new mode of historical inquiry on modernity as plural.<sup>10</sup>

'One of the most important implications of the term "multiple modernities" is that modernity and Westernization are not identical; Western patterns of modernity are not the only "authentic" modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence and continue to be a basic reference point for others.' (Eisenstadt, 2000b: 2-3).

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10) Two issues from *Daedalus* (2000, 1998) can be understood as examples of the burgeoning sociological interest in the historical development of modernity for regional studies.

In spite of the fact that different theoretical ideas coexist with the broad framework of multiple modernities, a theoretical question still remains concerning the overall direction for theorizing multiple modernities. And this especially when the theory of multiple modernities is mapped onto comparative-historical sociology, a problem - or dilemma - of the boundary-oriented conceptualization of modernities and their comparisons.

### *3.1. The space in which modernity gains historicity*

Many of the empirical examples of multiple modernities introduced under the rubric of the comparative-historical perspective, ultimately suggest that the existence of cross-national, regional differences constitute the crucial element of multiple modernities. Additionally, this attitude in most cases maintains the idea of 'bounded politics' and the strong view on culture heritage. The temporal agendas have been considerably informed by the territorial range covered by the influence of socio-political and economic agendas. Even though all analyses of multiple modernities neither presuppose a national setting as the unit of multiple modernities, nor fully intend to reshape national settings within more grand civilizational units, the overall configuration of multiple modernities is not entirely free from the mixed form of certain qualities of cultural influences and territorial units.<sup>11</sup>

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11) Most of all, the culture-centered idea for the understanding of multiple modernities can be found: 'The idea of multiple modernities presumes that the best way to understand the contemporary world - indeed to explain the history of modernity - is to see it as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs.' (Eisenstadt, 2000b: 2) The territorial idea for understanding multiple modernities implicitly occurs when the culturalist view seeks empirical examples of the cultural programs

The existence of several boundaries, which have been maintained mainly through their own socio-political mechanisms and which have been rather independent from external influences in developing their own socio-political and cultural models, has influenced comparative-historical sociology in accustoming it to produce research questions for historical analysis of particular features of these collective boundaries. While many modernization theorists indulged their ambitions as social engineers in dealing with each national and regional issue of economic developments and democratization, some of them looked to the historical and cultural foundations of spatial objects. In many non-European regional studies, the alternatives from the European and North-American experiences are assumed to have the same qualitative meanings for those indigenous regions. However, such a transplantation process has not been always peaceful and productive.

Some approaches in multiple modernities focus on the non-linear process in which historical and cultural backgrounds are introduced as major elements in the pursuit of plausible explanations for the reaction of indigenous cultures to modernization agendas and of the particular formation of inter-subjective relations between the modernizing agencies and other members of society. However, at the same time they observe that these alien institutional models began to take firm root in those societies and to have an important place for many actors here. For the theorist of multiple modernities under the legacy of modernization theory, multiple modernity is nothing but the multiple forms of modern society, of which major kernels are imported institutional models of politics and economic activities, which

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of modernity from the collective geo-political units which have their own boundaries.

enabled these societies to communicate with their Europeanized or Americanized cousins.

Increasing the number of institutional modules with which each collective unit could be compatible with another, must, in fact, be understood as the important contribution of European and American modes of modernization, so to speak. However, the neo-modernist idea of multiple modernities neither fully questions the problems of globalized institutional modules in the economic and political spheres, nor shows a great concern in modifying or improving them. Except for a few reappraisals of modernity in historicizing political projects in Europe - in which the history of institution-building processes in the nation-state system are radically evaluated and regional identity is carefully reformulated beyond fundamentalist views -, the institutionally-centered and culturally-oriented views of multiple modernities do not seem to be well linked to any political project which could be potentially understood as a new modernity.

### ***3.2. The civilizational analysis of multiple modernities***

Comparative-historical approaches to multiple modernities in most cases exist as macro analyses of historical processes for particular communities. Discovering the crucial elements that are assumed to determine the direction of societal and communal developments and describing long-term historical processes with a series of empirical examples of multiple modernities amount to the functionalist mode of narrating history in order to identify cultural factors for maintaining structural stability.<sup>12</sup> When the

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12) Although it looks like an out-of-date mode of descriptive comparison, Abrams (1982: 128) clearly points out the problematic aspect of the functionalist perspective for historical analysis: "for functionalists the

causes for the long duration, gradual transformation or radical emergence of political rupture need to be explained, macro analysis tends to look for answers either from the system itself, or from the circumstantial factors, rather than from the inter-active process among political actors.

The civilizational analysis in comparative-historical sociology has been dominated by the research focus on socio-political systems and grand circumstantial factors. One of the problems of civilizational analysis is that it could not move beyond presupposing the existence of the proprietary boundary for particular civilizational influences. Even though in many cases sociologists do not explicitly apply civilizational categories to particular regions, the certain combination between regional identity and civilizational characteristics is the implicit assumption for starting comparative research. Thereby, the space for inter-civilizational influences becomes fragmented in categorical separation and treated as the marginal place of each civilizational characteristic. Another problem of civilizational analysis is the consequent construction of the stereotype for socio-political and economic forms of human activities under the influence of grand civilizations, while implicitly intending to develop cross-civilizational typology. Questioning the long-term transformation of major religions and their genealogical development has not become a major theme of multiple modernities, while

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identification of function explains why things happen with such power that examining *how* they happen comes to seem quite unimportant. Historical analysis, by contrast proceeds on the assumption that the explanation of *why* things happen is inextricably contained within accounts of how things happen. Functionalist historical sociology cannot simply impose the former procedure on the latter but has to coordinate and combine them." (Abrams, 1982: 128, italics by the author)

civilizational analysis tends to focus on the cultural power of great religions. Assuming the long-term maintenance of civilizational influences across different historical times and their involvement in the emergence of multiple modernities, does not seem helpful for describing the history of inter-subjective tensions within a particular civilizational boundary.

Even though it is empirically true that the contents of religious and civilizational agendas became the reference points for political and economic actors, and even though it is possible to argue that they have significantly shaped actors' interpretive capacities for cosmological issues and human relations, it remains unpersuasive as the ultimate conclusion. What remains unexamined is its deep immersion in the premise of its own research agenda: it is only through the civilizational background, only within the civilizational legacy, that actors become actors and that they are understood as counter-actors by the other actors. While it is also irreducibly true that major religions in world history engage in socio-political and economic agendas to varying degrees and in different ways, the comparative evaluation of religions with their functional contribution to societal transformations, in many cases only partially highlights the power of religions in terms of encouraging and discouraging actors' particular practices. Only thus can actors' practices be understood as a representative form of religious influence. It is quite rare to find comparative-historical analysis in the converse mode of inquiry: how have political and economic actors found their own pragmatic reasons and ways for justifying their own activities from these religions in order to accelerate their own practices?

In fact, it is still questionable whether or not comparative-historical sociologists could formulate an alternative methodology for new ways of



What Norbert ELIAS (2000) assumes, like many other major historical sociologists, is the 'West' - Western Europe - as the given boundary in which distinctive elements can be illustrated. Even though he adroitly explicates the civilizing process for this region, the construction of the idea of the West has already been accepted in his conceptualization. Despite the fact that he correctly points to the problem of the Parsonian idea of 'the normal state of social equilibrium and its violation' by way of arguing that the concepts of the 'long-term historical process' and 'social development' were marginalized by statically-oriented sociology of the 1950s and 1960s (pp.449-483), Elias does not clearly notice the danger of utilizing concepts such as society and western Europe as boundary concepts. While his major foci are the continuous 'internal' changes of western Europe, which were used to broadly identify major historical configurations of western Europe, he had to implicitly rely on the assumption that western Europe is a historical entity that deserves an investigation of its own legitimate history. Could western Europe be accepted as a subject in this sense? If the answer is yes, is it a temporal agent or permanent one? If no, how is it possible to understand the history of human beings in the region without making strong boundary distinctions? Such questions generate puzzlement as to his rationale for western Europe being treated as an historical entity that could be contrasted with its counterparts. More seriously, his analysis gives an impression of constructing a history of a European people over long historical periods. In what way can people of the twelfth century and of the twenty-first century be seen to have shared elements upon which the history of the European people could be constructed? If Elias's intention was not to build the history of the European people, but only to describe historically the past of European civilization, he should have made more explicit the fact that the boundary, western Europe, has been a continuously constructed political and cultural entity, in which many elements supporting its



particular characteristics, have displayed uneven developments in western Europe so that their generalization becomes a formidable task. It is also noticeable that his way of introducing major civilizational elements is undermined by a kind of centre-periphery distinction of influence and expansion. Even though the expansion of civilizational elements from one central area or a few multiple centers to other peripheries is empirically provable - Elias clearly shows this civilizational expansion -, there is no a priori reason to assume that this process should be investigated under the heading of western European civilization. The *a priori* setting of the boundary for civilizational influence, is a very different matter from the historical investigation of the civilizing processes. In other words, the idea of western Europe is not justifiable from what Elias proves in his empirical research. Rather, the idea of the existence of western Europe is the driving force of his research.

For the purpose of this thesis, Korea as a nation, or a nation-state, is not treated as a historical entity or the Subject of history. One of the reasons for this reservation, is to avoid the problems of by-products that occur when it is treated as a territorial entity and a political and cultural subject. It is within the relationship with its neighbouring states and within the global nation-state system, that Korea unveils its meanings, compared with its counterparts. The historical track of political tensions among major Korean actors should not be equated with the history of politics in Korea. Because as soon as this is assumed, the comparison of Korean political actors with those from other regions and states, becomes a comparison between Korea and its counterparts. This would mean that boundary-oriented theorizing for the historical process could not be fully overcome and the question of how to dissolve rigid boundary politics could not be properly dealt with. In other words, in order to achieve a proper comparison for political activities among collective actors in different contextual backgrounds without depending on the

investigation of typological collections of cultural elements, itself dependent on a strong perception of the existence of the boundary, regarded as the container of homogeneous elements for internal members and thereby highly heterogeneous for others, should be deconstructed.

#### **4. The place of Korean experience in multiple modernities**

The major research trend in regional studies is boundary-oriented. Japanese studies, for example, has been considerably shaped by the implicit assumption of the existence of Japaneseness. In the same way as French upper class culture was implicitly identified as French culture itself in Elias's work on the history of manners, many sociologists look to identify certain peculiar characteristics from the activities of some Japanese actors so as to identify them as authentic features of Japanese modernity. By using the heavily loaded a priori assumption of the distinctive character of 'Japan', 'the Japanese' and 'Japaneseness', some scholars fail to recognize the existence of diverse political orientations among Japanese actors. Needless to say, this intellectual phenomenon has been influenced by historical research on Japanese civilization. On the opposite side of this trend, there is another perspective on 'modern Japanese society'. Some sociological research spotlights contemporary Japan rather than its long-term civilization, in the observation of Japan as a highly industrialized society and its social strata as similar to European and American societies (Sugimoto, 1997). In a sense, this perspective intends to find some compatible elements from modernized Japanese society, in order that Japan and other industrial countries could be situated on the same level of societal configuration. It goes without saying that boundary-centered or society-centered theorizing undermines any research for possible conceptual resemblance between the Japanese experience and its European and American counterpart (SHIN Jong-Hwa, 1999). Even though the investigation of

the contemporary stratification of Japanese society is one way of pursuing plausible comparisons, it does not clearly provide alternative answers to the Eliasian idea of the consequences of the civilizing process in Japan when the causes of modern rupture becomes the theme of inquiry. In other words, internal features of contemporary Japanese society for some scholars could only be investigated in a way of either to some extent ignoring the particular historical backgrounds of modern Japanese society or implicitly depending on the civilizational and cultural backgrounds for the identification of its long-term societal transformation. What kinds of theoretical lessons for multiple modernities can we learn from the overall historical transformation of Japan? Once the comparison based on the assumption of collective boundaries is considerably dismissed in this thesis, this question remains open.

If the Korean experience is regarded as an example of multiple modernities, it is not because the political boundary itself - which has been called Korea, as well as Chosun, Koryo, Balhae/Shilla, etc. -, has its own distinctive political and cultural color. Rather it is because the actors in Korean history generally, have shown themselves to be a good example for evaluating modernity. There have been a number of political actors who have dealt with their own political agendas within their world views, knowledge systems and political orientations. Regardless of quite different historical trajectories, the compatibility of the Korean experience with others under the title of multiple modernities, can be adduced - but should be further supported by continued research - both from the way in which human practices have emerged in their collective form, with their own political orientations, and in the relationship to other actors within a boundary. Korea should be identified by actors as their primary political theatre in which to present their own visions. In this sense, the so-called Korean experience, Korean modernity, Korean history and even Korean actors are no more than simply

metaphors introduced for describing some historical phenomena in the implicit comparison with its counterparts. Hence, the investigation of some influential elements for cultural resources in Korean history is beyond the aim of this thesis.

#### ***4.1. Korea as the political theatre and Korea as the political project***

Chapter 1 is basically concerned with the development of Confucian ideology, which reshaped the traditional Korean state, Chosun, in considerably different ways to the precedent states. A group of Neo-Confucian politicians and literati gained an alternative political orientation in relation to the preceding aristocrats of the Koryo state. Even though Confucianism in the history of the states in the East Asian region covering the 'Chinese, Japanese and Korean world'<sup>13</sup> was deeply involved in state affairs and a number of high bureaucrats could broadly be categorized as Confucian literati, the history of the rise of each state in dynasty-form includes little contribution from the Confucian literati. Once established, however, the role of Confucians in administrative affairs, the education of upper classes including royal families and management for socio-ethical and politico-cultural issues in the state becomes apparent. It is necessary here to note that their roles are limited under the power of kingship and aristocracy. In many cases, it can be argued, aristocrats with Confucian knowledge had these roles in the state. In other words, their roles mainly occurred after the state had been established, once its predecessors had declined through military conflicts. The rise of Chosun in regional history could be understood as an exceptional case for Confucians. What they achieved is more than 'successful management of bureaucratic affairs'. Neo-Confucian literati at the end of Koryo and at the beginning of Chosun, for the Korean context, took the role of changing the state itself as much as of providing new political visions for the state. In order

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13) See conceptual excursus 3 at the end of this introduction.

to understand the political activities of the Neo-Confucian literati, it is necessary to know not only the contents of Neo-Confucian doctrines in general, but also the actual process of realizing Neo-Confucianism within the politics of the new state.

In chapter 1 I intend to take distance from the mode of inquiry relating to Confucianism in general and Neo-Confucian doctrines in particular as providing political motives for Neo-Confucian political literati as their intellectual resource for dealing with socio-political agendas. Rather, I try to provide a answer to another mode of inquiry as to how the Neo-Confucian literati politically utilized Neo-Confucian doctrines as the method of presenting justification for their political activities. In other words, Neo-Confucianism as a whole, for example, which has been understood as the key element with which the characteristics of the traditional nation-state, Chosun, should be distinctively grasped, is not the purpose of the first chapter. Accordingly, the explanations of the initial development of Neo-Confucian thought in Song China and its introduction in Koryo via Yuan China will not be my concern. Rather, I will investigate the powerful representation of Neo-Confucian thought by actors in relation to their involvement in politics in late Koryo and the whole period of Chosun in order to overcome the problem, as evidenced by some sociologists, of constructing symbolic actors for representing a political class, a religious group, or a nation in describing the long-term historical process. If I followed the lead of earlier sociology of 'Korean modernity', I would accept the categories, the yangban class, the Confucian class, or the Korean, in contrasting them with the aristocrats, the Buddhist, the Japanese or the Chinese. It would be problematic to make an unified category, around which the existence of strong political tension between several Confucian literati, aristocrats, and Koreans is ignored. As an example, the fact that Confucian literati broadly who shared the basic idea of political and economic reforms finally fragmented in the face of the issue of abolishing Koryo and

building Chosun, could indicate that there were some crucial elements for their own political decisions beyond the political essence of Neo-Confucian doctrines. At the same time, some aspects of the power struggles among the state elite at the beginning of Chosun, through which the power balance between the kingship and the Confucian bureaucrats was inverted gradually, unveils the existence of diverse political interpretations of Neo-Confucian doctrines.

The overall relationship between the kingship and the Confucian bureaucrats and literati, needs to be investigated in order to fully understand the particular characteristics of Neo-Confucian politics in the Chosun context. The aristocratic tradition in the previous states changed considerably in Chosun. While the importance of familial lineage in socio-political life for the Yangban class was still maintained, the economic and rather absolute physical power in local areas and partly in central politics disappeared once Neo-Confucian doctrines became powerful tools, determining the direction of socio-ethical issues. The Neo-Confucian bureaucrats and literati instigated their own political roles within the state and for the nation, developing an institutional framework of instructive recommendation for kingship and a guideline for bureaucrats themselves. It is within this process that the power of the kingship over bureaucrats and literati was diminished. Due to the established ethical codification of the role of kingship for the nation, the kingship in most royal and state affairs had to follow the bureaucrats' proposals and advice based on customized Neo-Confucianist rules of the state. At the same time, the overall stabilization of the political structure was accompanied by continuous political confrontation among several factions of Neo-Confucian literati, who intellectually and politically reinterpreted any minor agendas in state affairs according to their knowledge of Confucianism.

These particular processes of Confucian politics, which were more distinctively institutionalized in the late Chosun period, have been investigated in Korean studies as a historical origin of 'civil society' for the Korean context. The debate on civil society with a Neo-Confucian style of politics in Chosun suggests once again the reconsideration of two important theoretical questions for a comparative understanding of political culture. Firstly, how could diverse political developments in different regions be meaningfully made compatible from the comparative perspective, using a the conceptual tool initially developed from one specific example? How could theoretical concepts maintain their explanatory power when they are introduced in different contextual situations? Secondly, if this is impossible, what kinds of data should alternatively be considered for a comparison between the Korean case and European ones? In order to provide plausible answers to these questions, I will broadly describe in the first chapter, the development of Neo-Confucian politics and will point to its particular characteristics, including its consequences in the war with the Japanese state and the change of the Chinese states.

If the first chapter is written with the purpose of reconsidering the meanings of Neo-Confucian politics in Chosun, the second chapter is mainly concerned with its transformation and subsequent break-down in the Korean context. Two different intellectual and political flows are introduced: one outcome derives from the Confucian heritage in replacing Neo-Confucian doctrine; the other, from a non-Confucian tradition of religious and political movements. Intellectuals in Chosun were subject to the Neo-Confucian environments existing in politics and philosophical knowledge systems.<sup>14</sup> While the basic requirements for the

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14) The introduction of the concept of the intellectual in the Korean context, would be problematic if a European origin, with particular English,

intellectual life of any thinker in Chosun period were to have their own views on Neo-Confucianism, any new philosophical and cosmological view received serious evaluation from the literati class and political elite. The production of an alternative paradigm beyond the orthodox views, on Confucianism in general and Neo-Confucianism in particular, had to be accompanied by a radical change of social ethics. Under this intellectual condition, no scholars or intellectuals were

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French, German or Russian connotations, were to be transposed without consideration of the particularity of the Korean situation, but will be loosely used for indicating some intellectual terrain in Korean history: see, Charle (2000); KANG Soo-Taek (2001). Most of all, the contemporary Korean translation of the intellectual - 지식인 or 지성인 - cannot be found in any political discourse or actual political disputes in Chosun. Besides, compared to their European counterparts, the socio-political groups who raised their voices in the traditional Korean context had different social bases, but also quite different political orientations and a different idea of politics and social ethics. As some of the major political conflicts show, the conflict itself was not differentiated from philosophical and ethical views. For this reason, the categorical distinction between state elite, bureaucrats, scholars in the state institution, and ordinary literati situated outside of the state, was unclear when political disputes occurred. Also, there was no clear antagonism between the state and intellectuals, because almost all major debates were concerned with certain policy orientations toward state affairs. However, both the practice-oriented interpretation of political and ethical agendas, and the highly loaded moral ideas in dealing with public issues meant that traditional Korean intellectuals were not an organized group but rather maintained tensions in diverse flows with other competitive actors, i.e., the kingship, other Confucian bureaucrats or political factions.



successful at inaugurating the representation of their political - which had to be at the same time philosophical - projects in Chosun, even though a number of reformist bureaucrats and intellectuals endeavored to introduce alternative policy agendas and to formulate their own philosophical paradigm. Unlike the well-educated literati and experienced bureaucrats, the peoples' movements for socio-political reform in the nineteenth century were mainly sustained by religious ideas and cosmological views different from Confucianism. While the economic and political reasons for some revolts against the local administrative structure were flamed by antagonism to the yangban class, these revolts became more powerful when the leaders raised the issue of a new state, religion, class liberation or nationalism, especially when the state elite could not secure the future of Chosun at the end of the nineteenth century.

Nonetheless, the process of producing an alternative political and intellectual paradigm against Neo-Confucianized societal rules was finally broken without changing Chosun. This, was mainly because the objects of abomination, Neo-Confucian doctrines, Confucianized Chosun society, the yangban class and kingship eventually disappeared in the colonization by the Japanese empire, a newly emergent regional power for the first time. The tension between Korean actors on conventional socio-political issues and the possible transformation of Chosun as the consequence of their power conflicts, were transformed as a result of the crisis of state sovereignty, which introduced alternative modernization paradigms from the European world. The socio-ethical issues dominated by Confucian vocabularies were radically replaced by political and economic agendas for the modernization of Chosun. The reformist policies for the abolition of the traditional class system, gender discrimination and the constitutional reshaping of the state, which would normally occur after conflictual intellectual debates and even political conflicts in the national level, were treated as mere

by-products of emergency measures for the state crisis. The second and following chapters will aim to show how the Korean community itself became fragmented into diverse orientations with rigid antagonistic standpoints, despite the all-pervasive state- and nation-centered attitude of political actors, current since the second half of the nineteenth century. Chapter 2, especially, will describe the illusion of the homogeneous community, in face of the crisis of state sovereignty and the genesis of modernist alternatives.

The colonial experience in the first half of the twentieth century facilitated strong modernist inclinations for political actors. Increased role of the state, especially, for reorganizing society, conspicuous in the economic and political activities of the colonial state, became the central issue for Korean actors. While political suppression by the colonial state led to a strong reaction from many Koreans - but not all! -, economic transformation proceeded under Japanese military expansionism, which not only accelerated industrialization of the economic structure, but also changed the class structure from the traditional status hierarchy to that of capitalism. The symbolic power of kingship and the ethical codes from Neo-Confucian doctrines in Chosun were replaced by the power of the state itself and newly established modern laws. The colonial state could not control society without a new legal apparatus and institutional settings, including an administrative structure.

Research on what occurred and what changed in the colonial period has been one of the most sophisticated themes of Korean studies. In short, two modernist views - the nationalist and the developmentalist - have shaped the basic interpretation of historiography for the colonial experience, especially the impact of the colonial state as the symbol of Japanese influence. These views maintain two extremes

based on different methodological standpoints. For instance, the nationalist perspective based on the binary opposition between we, the victims, Koreans and they, the aggressors, the Japanese has a rigid idea of national community. At the same time, strong counter-factual claims on what could have occurred, if Japan had not occupied Korea, increased the nationalist idea. Of course, the emphasis on the early modernization process effected by Korean actors in the pre-colonial period had a strong input. Consequently, such theorizing cannot be excluded from the critique of developmentalism. The developmentalist view clearly assumes the existence of an asymmetric difference of institutional qualities between what could be found in Korea under the Japanese influence, on the one hand, and what had already existed and what was introduced, but never fully practiced, before Japanese occupation, on the other. Economic developmentalism was deeply influenced by the assumption of 'what the modern is', as the foundation for comparison. The historical models with which the Korean example is compared in many cases are European and Japanese. For that reason, in spite of their non-nationalistic temper, boundary-oriented typological comparison for different economic structures under modernist orientation is subject to a normative critique of developmental nationalism in Korean and Japanese studies. Chapter 3 introduces some debates on economic transformation related to the colonial policies for re-evaluating modernist discourse in Korean studies.

The overall conclusions from the colonial experience - making a strong nation-state with economic prosperity within the republican form of the state, rather than either constitutional monarchy, on the one hand, and radical political alternatives to bourgeois democracy, on the other - were accepted by major Korean actors. However, the ways in which Korean actors pursued an independent nation-state in new international circumstances were firmly linked to the new Western and Japanese solutions for modernization that criticized the

Neo-Confucian past of the state. Although many intellectuals and even the political trajectories of the transformative period of Chosun before colonization included the themes of the restructuring of the state and national economy as well as universal freedom and a civilizational alternative, these political orientations were mobilized by knowledge systems that were under the influence of the Neo-Confucian socio-political matrix. Thus, it can be argued that Korean actors interpreted newly introduced alternatives under the traditional knowledge system, and that, in the process of identifying similar political and ethical elements, many Koreans welcomed the modern alternatives without fully rejecting the former. In the same vein, one could argue that a mixed form of political and ethical framework occurred from the combination of the two, rather than privileging the latter over the former. In contrast, the fact that concrete solutions for the emergent political and economic agendas of the state and nation were sought in the Western and Japanese experience, may point in another direction. The change in the tools for justification in intellectual debates and public discourse was more clearly observable when major political actors criticized their political counterparts. The occurrence of military conflicts between socialist and communist groups, on the one hand, and the proponents of Korean participation in the colonial state and other nationalists of the right, on the other, was driven by their antagonistic interpretations of the other side, due to accumulated negative imageries which occurred in practice once they had developed their own political and economic alternatives for the future of Korea. While chapter 3 partly illustrates the transformation of major political actors in terms of their constructive ideas for the political and economic agenda, chapter 4 is mainly concerned with their ideological and military clashes within the actual process of building an independent nation-state.

The division of the Korean peninsula and the emergence of two Korean states in

the South and North and their conflict known as the Korean war can be understood as the main events in the post-colonial historiography of Korea in the 1940s and 1950s. Also, while the Korean situation considerably fuelled the ideological tension of the cold war, the rationale based on antagonism in the Korean peninsula has shaped the current status of two Korean states and peoples' lives. Regrettably, it is still an on-going process in Korea. The investigation of the influences of the Korean war in the socio-political development of South Korea and the process of its economic modernization should start from the question of how two Korean states were established before the Korean war and of how the Korean war changed the political situation for the states. In short, without an understanding of the political origins of the Korean war as the legacy of the colonial experience, the nature of the military conflict could not be correctly understood. While it should be acknowledged that the Korean war in some cases includes elements of the international war in which a number of states were involved, it should be recognized that the Korean war was the main phase of a broader civil war in Korea. If any historiography ignores the character of civil war in investigating the Korean war, then, it would be classified as an inter-state war. In extending this perspective, the political situation in South Korea at that time would be ignored as a non-significant variable for understanding the Korean war. In chapter 4, I raise the issue of the tension in the historiography of the Korean war by unveiling the existence of the dilemmas in interpreting the actual process of the post-colonial politics. Even the recognition of the day the war began and the day it ended is shaped by a subjective position. The issue of responsibility for the occurrence of the Korean war is a subjective judgement for major political actors including the states involved.

While chapter 4 investigates the role of the war in symbolically transforming the ideology of some mere political actors to that of the South Korean state itself,

chapter 5 elucidates the process of how the state became the main force for modernization in South Korea. Treating the state as an independent political actor, in reality the most powerful actor, in the Korean context requires the critical evaluation of a basic premise of the theory of civil society: the relationship between state and society. A predominant interest of the political sciences in civil society in the 1990s derives from global political changes. The fragmentation of the former-soviet bloc in Eastern Europe and flourishing democratic movements in some countries in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and South America, for example, meant that civil society as a political theme highlighted the democratic alternative to an authoritarian state, whereas the regulation of the market was the focus for the North American debate on civil society. The theoretical construction of the existence of (civil) society outside the state and the market in the political theory of democracy of the 1990s, in many cases ignores two facts. Firstly, civil society cannot be fully organized as one political society with diverse political orientations. Secondly, and more seriously, the anti-thesis, the state, has been developed within the societal environment where some groups of political actors within the boundary are in charge of state power. In other words, the conflict between civil society and state is in fact the conflict between political actors within society. While the identification of democratic actors finds the subject for political development in civil society, the problematic political actors, who initially arose from society and subsequently transformed themselves into the state elite, assume to be independent of societal influences.

The contemporary history of democratic movements in South Korea and the state-centered modernization process illustrate how the state gained power over society and how a few political actors enjoyed state power within the construction of the authoritarian state. The particularity of the Korean situation could be explained by the historical observation that the process of making a new

nation-state after the colonial experience did not proceed on the basis of an overall consensus of major political actors, without which the creation of state legitimacy was at stake. Such a consensus was not possible when some political groups transformed themselves into state power and others disappeared. The initial problem of state legitimacy occurring in the 1940s and 1950s and the undemocratic maintenance of state institutions by a military elite and technocrats until 1980s, could be taken to show how the South Korean state has become alienated from societal influence. However, political actors including democratic movement groups in that period have focused on the power of the state in order to achieve their own political and economic visions. The binary opposition between state and society cannot fully explain the formation of the state-centered idea of politics for counter-state actors' political alternatives, as well as how the major state-elite and a supportive conservative network treated the state, in order to maintain or extend their own political power over counter-state actors.

The relationship between the state elite and counter-state actors became the political background for the growth of the South Korean economy. State-centered economic modernization in South Korea was the consequence of the conflictive political process of the post-war situation. Political suppression of democratic movements and systematically organized industrial policies for development occurred as the realization of political justification of the lack of legitimacy for maintaining state power. In short, economic growth has been the source of political legitimacy for the Korean context. At the same time, faced with economic crises, the state responded with severe political suppression of democratic movements.

Since the late 1980s, there has been a significant socio-political transformation in

South Korea, in which the relationship between political actors is undergoing radical change. The tension between the state and counter-state actors has changed to a state of multiple tensions among political actors. While the state has lost its physical power over democratic actors, counter-state actors have also become disunified in fragmentation. An analysis of the changing relationship between democracy and economic development, needs to explain the way in which the political structure under the influence of the authoritarian state is changing and what kinds of new qualifications for leading the public sphere are now required. The existence of a deep correlation between democracy and economic development replaced earlier debates on the implications of religion and the type of state for economic development and political democracy (Lipset, 1959), although it did not adequately address the effect of cultural influences on economic and political activities. Even though some scholars in this field have argued that the driving force of democratization is the working class, rather than other economic actors, they do not clearly foresee the direction of democratization because they fail to address the question of what kinds of new political agendas will replace the conventional ones of welfare and political freedom based on legal status. The Korean situation in the 1990s and onwards, for example, as the period for a new political configuration, shows the rise of local issues, based on local historical and cultural experiences, as well as the global issues of economy, ecology and the human rights movements. In other words, the correlation between economic development and democratization could not comprehensively account for the on-going transformation in the political and economic sphere including changes of political actors themselves.

It is arguable that South Korea has become democratized. However, it is not due to the transformation of the economic sphere including economic development, even though strong workers movements have made a big impact on politics. It is,



rather, peoples' increased political consciousness through the observation of or participation in, a series of political conflicts and disputes over political issues and their increased role in the decision making process in the political sphere that enables the tensions between state and society, or between political actors to change direction. The state elite's ultimate acknowledgement of the impotence of their previous measures - physical suppression for example - in dealing with democratic movements at the pivotal point of political tension could be understood this way. At the same time, the incompetence of both state elite and the conservative network as against counter-state actors, in dealing with newly emerging economic and political issues could also be interpreted likewise. Chapter 6 looks at major political phenomena after the collapse of the authoritarian state, where this dynamic of South Korean politics, saw the emergence of many political actors unwilling to compromise with competing actors. Even though the observation that South Korean politics has been democratized is acceptable - as long as there would be no serious objection -, the problematic tradition of antagonism against other political actors is still maintained while the political structure and power relations have changed. Given the fact that rigid political tensions among political actors are seldom solved, the future of Korean politics seems uncertain in terms of anticipating the further progress of democratic achievements, as well as economic developments under the conventional standpoint of the economic theory of democracy.

#### ***4.2. Changing political tensions and the transformation of political actors***

The overall structure of this thesis is configured so as to make a historical map of political tensions, significant ruptures and major political actors over the last six hundred years of Korean history. In such a schematic approach, many events and related political actors and intellectuals may be excluded. The North Korean

experience is barely included in this thesis. This is, above all, due to the lack of materials available to me, supplying condensed descriptions of long-term development of political tensions for the North Korean state. However, it should be acknowledged that this is not fully justifiable and privileges the South Korean experience in the last four chapters: without a balanced investigation of the North Korean experience for the comparative perspective, the South Korean counterpart could not be properly understood. In mitigation, I direct the readers attention once more to the aim of my thesis which does not intend to introduce the Korean experience as a boundary-based example of multiple modernities, but rather, to reconsider the meaning of long-term political transformation and societal changes, driven by the consequences of inter-subjective relationships among political actors in particular situations.

The basic assumption underpinning this thesis is that many works in the comparative-historical field are shaped by two problematic attitudes which are not generally dealt with by comparative sociologists in a critical way: firstly, the influence of classical sociology, emphasizing epochal rupture and boundary-oriented theorizing of collective identity; secondly, the implicit acceptance of a long-term continuity of collective identity under the power of the socio-cultural matrix, rather than highlighting the diverse presentations of the capacities of human beings dealing with their necessary agendas and their own normative orientations toward particular situations. In the first chapter I introduce Chosun as a new nation-state, different from previous states in the Korean context, in order to argue that political transformation determining the path for a national community has occurred, not only on a different time-scale, but also in a different direction from other regional examples. In this way, I introduce, in chapter 2 and 3, the imagery of modern rupture in the Korean context which was shaped by Korean actors' experiences, even though major political actors welcomed new

alternatives from the European and North American experiences. Chapter 4, 5, 6 show how competing political and economic ideas have together shaped Korean politics, while chapter 7 opens new possibilities for the coming political project, the (re)unification of Korea. Needless to say, political actors and their antagonistic attitudes have made for a dynamic political transformation, as well as related societal changes. The remaining questions concerning the evaluation of boundary politics, for a sociological view beyond civilizational analysis and boundary-oriented comparative sociology, could only be answered by way of identifying the directions of some discourses on regional integration and on-going national developments. In chapter 7, I introduce the necessity of historical reasoning for how boundary politics should be treated in the new political project. In spite of the fact that Korean (re)unification is *de facto* nothing other than the national project, the unification of the two Korean states could fundamentally change the political geography, and thereby increase geometrically freedom and democracy, which has been restricted because of the hostility between the two states. The democrats' advocacy of unification and their reasoning for the national project provide an example of the particular political implication of boundary politics, through which a rigid political boundary is itself deconstructed. At the same time, the socio-political integration of European nation-states could be recognized within the extension of the Korean implication of making new boundary politics. European integration for the democratic vision, not as the idea of restoring civilizational heritages or extending them into the new borders, but with the idea of dissolving national boundaries through overcoming several political and economic problems, also provides a good example of the historical understanding of boundary politics. In short, if European integration is to proceed further and if Korean reunification is to be achieved in the near future, it is necessary to be aware of the status quo of boundary politics for the double identification of the remaining role of boundary politics for democracy, on the one

hand, and its possible danger in being open to nationalist or regionalist perversion, on the other.

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Conceptual Excursus>

1. It seems necessary to clarify what I mean by political actors in order to understand the process of political transformation. In fact, for a reader who has followed the debate on the relationship between 'agency' and 'structure' in sociology - for an understanding of this debate, see Archer (1995) -, the conceptual tools of political actors need to be explained in terms of the conceptual relationship between 'agential power' and 'overloaded structural influence' in the actual process of practice by actors. Insofar as one is not concerned with constructing a general theory of action covering all human activities - which is not the intention of the thesis -, there is a practical way of recognizing actors' practices. Significantly, except for some phenomena regarded as natural events, the actors' 'track of practices' are discovered through political events as the relational form of practices linking actors within a particular situation. Even though there must be enough room for interpreting their activities as 'role plays', and in this sense, of recognizing the given power of the structural element, there is also the space for identifying their treatment of structures by way of an instrumental orientation as a possible resource for actors' purposes. The theoretical tension between these different interpretations of human action becomes serious only when confronted by the following type of question: why did it - an event, for example - happen through them at that time rather than through others in a different place and in a different time?; how is it possible to make it - an institutional model, for example - applicable for different places? While the former mainly concerns

particularity and specificity. the latter highlights generality and commonality. At the same time, whereas the former is intended to produce the interpretation of the event which had already occurred, the latter is intended to extend its applicability for further practice. However, they are of course intertwined with each other in many practical ways. None of these question types are seriously dealt with in this thesis, even though some causes for the occurrence of events are introduced and some experiences from the transformation of Korean society may provide some meaningful lessons.

There are some theoretical merits in ignoring those questions. First of all, in so doing, the strong assumption of the existence of cultural particularities and civilizational heritages, or of any structural causes, partly loses its ground. Consequently, rather than identifying detailed causal backgrounds in the investigation of how political actors achieved or failed to attain their political ambitions in face of other actors' interventions, such an approach requires the dynamic explanation of several elements for the occurrence of political events. From the point of view of the actor, the recognition of pressure from any external causes - enforced particular response modes from given rules, for example - other than own self-disciplined decision, is largely dependent on the actor's own interpretation of the gap between the normal relationship - the acceptable one, provoking no special consideration by the actor; voluntary embodiments and given instructions, and the abnormal relationship - the emergent tension between the actor's personal judgement and required actions.

This thesis tries to show that the political actors are continuously influenced by political events, and that contradictions arise in their

transaction with different political agendas - one could understand this either as the incomplete role play of agents, or disorganized practices by autonomous actors. Political actors are flexible and at the same time not fully controllable by any instruction. At least, it will be shown that the grand classificatory titles - Neo-Confucian literati, for example - given to some political actors are not comprehensively explanatory for the investigation of specific events in which they take part. An advantage gained from this would be a possible openness when comparing different political actors and their different forms of institutional practices in a broad comparison concerning their historical necessities justified by the actual practitioners in the particular historical period.

In order to formulate a proper comparative tool for diverse political actors in different political periods, there seem to be several theoretical requirements for answering the three questions which are very generally raised for comparative-historical sociology. Paraphrasing for the Korean experience, these questions are: first, how is it methodologically possible to compare the Neo-Confucian political elite in the late fourteenth century and modernists in the late nineteenth century or socialists in the 1940s?; second, although it is possible to utilize a comparative tool for this purpose, is the comparative tool contributive to understanding their different political ideas and different practical modes in different circumstances?; third, what is the basic purpose of mapping those historical actors with the comparative tool, or for which theoretical reasoning can they be taken as examples? - Sewell introduces similar questions for doubting the validity of a comparison between different historical actors and different historical phenomena in his critique of the teleological understanding of historical sociology. See Sewell (1996).

While it is a truism that political actors are temporal and situated in a specific phase of history, the way of comparing them should not depend on an asymmetric balance in which one actor's ideas and practices become the basic standard for comparison. In other words, neither the modernist idea in the late nineteenth century nor Neo-Confucian thought of the fourteenth century, nor the socialist visions of the 1940s should be used as the standard for comparison imposed on the others. A comparative tool should be created to some extent by the author's own will, which would provide the freedom for conceptualization of empirical-historical examples under the awareness of its historical necessity for certain political projects of her/his own time- Wagner introduces some examples of intellectual intervention in the transformative period in the history of the social sciences and of a new necessity of renewing the intellectual tradition in the current European situation (see, Wagner 1996, 1994). It is also possible to link some works distancing one's own position from the dominant intellectual circumstances in order to critically evaluate them, so as to suggest a new conceptualization for interpreting historical phenomena (see, Husserl 1997, for example). Historically, most political actors in the Korean experience have been shaped by strong political orientations based on their own normative foundations, even though their cosmological views diverge. Because actors faced strong reactions by counter-actors to their political orientations and underpinning normative foundations with regard to their concrete political agendas, most political confrontations show a serious conflictive character rather than compromise-oriented negotiation. This thesis mainly focuses on how the political relationship between Korean political actors has been shaped in this way. Such a primary observation on some basic elements of political actors in different political situations, despite its

very low level of theorizing, enables social theorists to rethink the meanings of modern political actors in the Korean context under the awareness of their historical predecessors. This does not directly mean that modern political actors are still influenced by civilizational heritages or that they share cultural elements with traditional political actors. Rather, by arguing the existence of similar modes of political activities - deliberately drawn in conceptualization -, their differences in political visions and their detailed agendas are more distinctively understood.

2. This problem could also be understood in the broad sense as the dilemma of the academic discipline of comparative-historical sociology in general.

"Comparative sociology refers to cross-cultural and/or cross-national research, and also includes comparisons of civilizations, historical periods, regions, communities, and institutional sectors. Historical sociology refers to studies that examine processes over time and that describe and explain social phenomena that have been delimited historically. Comparative-historical sociology is thus interpreted to encompass a wide variety of theoretical positions, methodological styles, and substantive topics."

The above definition of the disciplinary field of comparative-historical sociology provided by the American Sociological Association - see, Comparative and Historical Sociology Homepage: <http://www.sla.purdue.edu/academic/soc/comphist/sectionpage.html> - reflects the general research approach in that field. Widely assumed comparative methods and the objects of comparison and their temporal presentations are encompassed within the ambit of the broad disciplinary framework. However, if there is a problematic aspect to the above understanding, it is the constructionist attitude towards making ideal-types for defining its tasks. Methodologically, if any researcher accepts the comparative idea as outlined



above, he/she would have fixed conceptions on culture(s), nation(s) and civilization(s) before a comparative work is undertaken. One would think that to have knowledge of these objects of comparison could only be attained by historical research on them. However, empirical research on the historical formation of these cultures, nations and civilizations does not necessarily guarantee the required factual evidence that each has its own distinctive features for comparison, unless the factual evidence does not itself rely on conceptual tools or strong assumptions for conceptualization. Of course, the validity of conceptual tools is verified by the empirical research. The problematic relationship between conceptual tools and their objects is that at the deep level they are both inter-dependent and at the same time inter-supportive for the production of comparative knowledge. In short, in order to facilitate research on cross-cultural, cross-national or cross-civilizational comparison, there are two prerequisites: empirical knowledge of the objects of comparison; and a conceptual assumption. However, what is the purpose of comparative sociology? Is it not to gain advanced knowledge of the objects of comparison? Ironically, it means that comparative sociology in the above definition depends on the validity of a prerequisite, which it intends to get in advance.

Often, comparative works of sociology are accustomed to producing typological comparisons, or at least, many sociologists do not fully exclude the possibility of situating their works within a typological comparison. Needless to say, in order to make a typological comparison, any object of comparison should have its own categorical place. Ironically, however, making a categorical place for objects of comparison should necessitate the factual conclusion that such objects exist as empirical entities rather than abstract concepts. Cultures and civilizations, not as abstract concepts, but as

empirical entities, are dependent on other entities in either a negative or positive way and on different levels of comparison. While the typological comparison itself is intended to produce advanced knowledge for the items in comparison, the items gain their distinctive meanings within the typological comparison. Regrettably, the general argument that the existence of the objects' distinctive features is the precondition for comparison, does not secure the validity of comparison once it occurs unless the conceptual precondition has already been established. What, then, are the sources of conceptual differentiation for the objects of comparison? Only an empirical evidence provided by the objects themselves?

It seems considerably problematic to argue that many concepts in comparative historical sociology have been introduced in the full awareness of their conceptual limits. Culture and civilization, for example, have had different connotations for different academic environments which have been influenced by particular class and national cultures. Many works on the historical development of these concepts and their different usages, at least indirectly, show how often the concepts for describing the collective features including members within a boundary have been introduced via strong political assumptions - and here there are some exemplary works on the genealogy of the concepts of culture and civilization (see, Elias, 2000; Anderson, 1996; Eagleton, 2000). In fact, sociological works rarely treat the concepts as the independent objects of inquiry. Rather, culture and civilization normally unveil their meanings when they are matched with a boundary-type of object- nations, regions etc. -, or certain social strata with class-oriented or any collective form of human activities - religion, for example. As the objectives of comparative-historical sociology enunciated by the American Sociological Association show, it is cross-national

comparisons and cross-regional comparisons that better reveal the contents of cultures and civilizations.

In how many sociological works in the comparative-historical field have the contents of cultures and civilizations been problematized without depending on counter-examples from other cultures and other civilizations? Are what have been explained and described as the expressive forms of culture and civilization persuasively satisfied by the conceptual requirements of those concepts? For example, is the required element of a shared commonality for the concept of culture really shared by all members of a collective organization? Or is a civilizational heritage really shared by all members of the civilization? Comparative sociology does not fully investigate its research object unless and until it inquires in the validity of cultures and civilizations and comprehends the incomplete nature of these concepts, largely ignored or by-passed in the field. In a sense, in order to develop comparative research, comparative sociology should be dependent on other disciplines with regard to the validity of concepts such as culture, nation, civilization, institutions, community and regions. In fact, however, is it not comparative sociology itself that is the academic discipline which has been dedicated to the validity of these concepts and their historical- viz., their temporal- forms?

3. It seems necessary to clarify the practical usage of the term, 'Chinese, Japanese and Korean world' rather than China, Japan and Korea in this thesis. The latter usage is based on the implicit acceptance or the advocacy of presentism in the idea of (nation) states in the East Asian region: the current status of Chinese, Japanese and Korean states as the narrative subjects of political and cultural history. In spite of the fact that there have

been fewer ethnic states in East Asian history than in European history, the history of states in the region shows an uneven development of power relations and territorial changes as particular characteristics of regional politics, which should not be neglected in regional history, but which are normally marginalized in long-term historical analysis.

Whereas pre-modern Japanese history hardly shows any impact for regional political order, despite many military conflicts between local semi-state powers and some territorial change within the Japanese islands, the history of Chinese and Korean states has been deeply related to the rise and fall of military semi-states in the Manchu (만주滿洲) region and in Mongolian territories. While the Chinese states, in an ethnic perception which is widely acknowledged in the region - the Han (한漢) -, were twice razed by Mongolians and Manchurians and ruled by them for nearly four hundred years in the last millenium, Korean states had to follow their regional political hegemonies. Also, the long-lasting conflicts between Korean states in the Korean peninsula and the eventual disappearance of the political influence of Korean states in Manchu and the inner-Mongolian area are recorded in the regional political history of the first millenium. In other words, when the history of the Chinese states is investigated, it is impossible to ignore the political occupation by Mongolians and Manchurians, while the history of Manchu and Manchurians necessitates the consideration of Korean involvement. However, the disappearance of the Manchurian state in Manchu and the inclusion of ethnic Manchurians in current China, also raise some important questions on the history of Chinese states, as well as regional political history. Most of all, the current Chinese state itself has a multi-ethnic composition, in spite of ethnic Hans' (한족漢族) influential domination of state affairs. Therefore, one could

claim that the collapse of Ming China (명명) by Qing (청청) in the seventeenth century and the current occupation of Manchu and the inner-Mongol region by the People's Republic of China are political issues within China, rather than one of China's relation to other ethnics and their previous state - even though there must be different historical interpretations for the territory beyond the great-wall, that symbol of territorial division between China and other Northern Asian ethnics.

Further, the existence of two separate Korean states in the contemporary situation and their rather different construction of historiography concerning ancient Korean states, leave unresolved issues for interpreting regional history in the intellectual world. The current division of Korea is more than the political separation between socialism and anti-communism. The capital of South Korea, Seoul, has been regarded as the symbolic centre of Korean politics since the fifteenth century, when it was decreed as the capital of Chosun. Also, in spite of several territorial changes in northern Korea, the states established within the Korean peninsula have been regarded by many historians and the political elites for a long time as the authentic Korean states which have maintained the genuine Korean culture and territory. The northern Korean peninsula, Manchu, inner-Mongol have been not only politically and culturally, but also historically marginalized in the dominant historiography. However, through the recent development of historical and archeological research on northern Korea, Manchu and inner-Mongol, especially on the capital of North Korea, Pyongyang, many historians began to argue revisionist ideas on the history of Korean states, focusing on northern states over the border of the Korean peninsula and the current Northern Chinese territory. Available historical resources for evaluating the history of the Korean states, historical documents,

archeological ruins, for example, could prove that the civilizational flow before the second millenium came from the North and spread to the South. In a sense, the ancient history becomes one of major historical nodal points with which the current political situation is reinterpreted. Also, one could argue that the current political division provokes radical reinterpretations of the history of the Korean state. See, AN Cheon (1995).

The ancient history of Japan and Southern Korea is also contestable. As the debate among Japanese and Korean historians over the issue of history textbooks in Japan shows, the lack of historical documents and other resources have enabled historians in the two countries to interpret their national histories in different ways. While some Japanese scholars argue that the ancient Japanese state in the first half of the first millenium had its own governing territory in the Korean peninsula and its own influential power over a Korean state, Baekje (백제百濟), many Korean historians and some Japanese scholars have contradictory claims about how ancient Japan was politically and culturally influenced by ancient Korean states, especially, Baekje (백제百濟) and Shilla (신라新羅). Moreover, a few historians argue, from historical records proving significant movements of peoples between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese islands, that the national identities, Korean and Japanese, should be reevaluated for that time. See, YEON Min-Soo (1998); CHOI Jae-Seok (1997a, 1997b).

Unlike the strong national historiography of the three nations in Chinese, Japanese and Korean studies, the genealogical investigation of the history of the states, regional politics and civilizational backgrounds in East Asia reveals that the theory of the nation-states in three regional studies have their own conceptual problems for these regional studies in explaining own

national identities and political representations. Consequently, and in order not to simply ignore the existence of different ideas for the histories of current China, Japan and Korea, the loose expression of 'Chinese, Japanese and Korean world' is used for the practical purpose of this thesis.

## 1. Neo-Confucianism and the nation-state: modernity and ethics

### **Introduction: Neo-Confucianism in the political project**

Confucianism in Korean studies has been seen as the main civilizational factor for Korean history that constructs the overarching framework of social relations in general, and economic and political activities in particular. Within the broad classification of civilizational boundaries in the classical social sciences, Confucianism has been commonly assumed as the image maker of East Asia where Korea is geo-culturally located. The two extreme poles of Confucianism; a normatively established, negative traditional resource, and the valuable heritage, have appealed not only to comparative culturalists in anthropology, but also to institutionalists in political economy. These observations for the comparative-historical point of view, in fact, are neither true nor false for several reasons, depending on how Confucianism is treated in specific research foci. If one wants to take the mirror effect from European civilization which developed under the influence of 'Christianity', it must be possible to similarly consider Confucianism for East Asia. However, if it is important to separately identify the contribution of Protestantism from that of Catholicism and the Orthodox Church over the last five hundred years of European history, the social scientist should be aware of the emergence of Neo-Confucianism as a variant of classical Confucianism in China in the twelfth century, and its introduction to Korea at least in the early the thirteenth century.<sup>1</sup> If Judaism ought not to be forgotten for the development of Christianity in Europe, its counterpart would be at least partially found in Taoism and the Buddhism of East Asia. However, these three ways of comparing European history to East Asian history may not be fully acceptable for more

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1) The term, Neo-Confucianism, is understood as the translated name of *Hsing-li hsueh* (Sung-Li Hak성리학性理學), which could literally be taken to mean "learning of human nature and principle".



careful scientific inquiries, insofar as these measure the degrees of influence for the institution building process of ordinary peoples' epistemological views on the universe and overall human relations. At least as far as religion is concerned, the broad influence of the coexistence of plural religions for making specific characteristics of human relationships in East Asian history in general and the Korean one in particular, seems extremely difficult to find in its European counterpart (YOON Yee-Heum, 2001). At the same time, however, we still cannot avoid introducing Confucianism, in order to grasp something crucial that is supposed to exist in East Asia. This ambivalent position should be seriously considered, even before the social scientists begin any comparative research. And this, because some methodological tools and major concepts developed in the social sciences could possibly overinflate an institutional phenomenon which was marginal, or could neglect a culturally particular way of political practices which was central.

Max WEBER's work on China (1951) seems to straddle the problematic aspects of the sociology of religion in the comparative-historical perspective: presupposing the autonomous realm of religion for socio-economic activities and assuming an implicit connection between religion and geographic boundary. Weber does not provide a full explanation for the social process in which certain religious ethics are mobilized for providing economic justifications from economic actors' points of view: Why were particular religious ethics rather than others more welcomed by economic actors? This problem could be extensively interpreted. To put it in the form of an opposition of extremes: that Weber ignores economic actors' autonomy for promoting capitalism via the secured justificatory tools of Protestantism, because he wants to identify the significant influence of Protestantism on economic lives, as that which led economic actors to capitalism. Within these two opposite theoretical attitudes; the premise of the infinitude of

human creativity for the former and of the powerful influence, if not determinacy, of certain religious ethics for the latter, Weber's writings on the relationship between religion and capitalism is open to different theoretical reviews (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999). It is also interesting to read Richard H. TAWNEY's (1938) understanding of the historical contribution of Puritanism to the rise of English capitalism for a comparative understanding of Weber's theoretical assumption: "The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so." (Weber, 1996: 181) "'The capitalist spirit' is as old as history, and was not, as has sometimes been said, the offspring of Puritanism. But it found in certain aspects of later Puritanism a tonic which braced its energies and fortified its already vigorous temper." (Tawney, 1938: 226)

However, Weber's problem could also be seen in the context of the observation that his theoretical interests were to discover a new ethical rupture in the economic sphere for his period. While he sees capitalism as producing its own economic motives and rationalized justifications for the further process, he definitely wanted to grasp what kind of social mechanism had operated at the early stage of capitalism, which in his view was now already exhausted (Weber, 1996). The implications of Weber's strong assumption that religious ethics becomes a dominant social force, raise some problematic aspects for the contemporary sociology of religion which became one of the major institutionalized fields for comparative-historical sociology. While Weber conceptually accepted the historical rupture between the rationalization of capitalism and its religious predecessor, at the same time he left the future open, in spite of the rise of rationalized capitalist institutions and of a secularization process for dealing with overall social agendas in human relations. Because he investigated the past as the original formation of capitalism and suggested certain linkages between Protestantism and the acceleration of capitalist development,

some contemporary sociologists of religion seem to be lured by the assumption that the past is, or should be, clearly understood in sociological reasoning as the foundation of the present condition, while the future is opened as dependent on the on-going practices of the present. This becomes a serious problem when they are confident in explaining the history of capitalism in Europe, following Weber, and have a profit in pursuing Weber's thesis on the historical process of economic development for other regions. The common way of developing comparative research on the history of economic activities in non-European regions is to build theoretical comparisons among different religions, as Weber himself investigated Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in the Chinese world. In order to do this, he had to formulate the ethical frameworks for these religions so as to enable their comparison with Protestantism. However, what Weber partially fails to describe for the religions of China is, unlike his writings on European history, particular aspects of Chinese politics and its overall social environments. These are difficult to compare to the European counterpart, but are crucial for understanding the historical setting of the religious realm in the Chinese world. Even though Weber does not need to introduce a particular historical setting for Protestantism in northern Europe, he should have explicitly introduced this dimension in his study of the Chinese world. At the same time, while Weber's introduction of Protestant ethics into the social and economic sphere was theoretically plausible, in the sense that his present was already undermined by the existence of a significant rupture in the motivation for economic lives, he sees a rather underdeveloped rupture in China in the epochal sense, so that his investigation of Eastern religions becomes theoretically less distinctive.

Weber's rather 'unclearly' drawn methodology in his historical research, due to his primary interest in the comparative studies on world religions, has been reintroduced in the rise of regional studies, where religions become tied to the

geographical idea of boundary. For early modernization theorists in the 1950s and 1960s, who exclusively accepted the idea of the universal project of societal development, the different states of industrial development could be explained by cultural elements, including religions. Some contemporary sociologists of religion, who follow Weber, commit a serious error in interpreting Weber's initial idea that identifies the contribution of religions in developing capitalism, in that they exclusively accept, in an ahistorical perspective, the power of Protestantism beyond its historical conditions in which the religious doctrines and applied socio-economic ethics inescapably respond to other realms in solving epochal issues, while they implicitly assume other religions in other regions are not similarly well bound.

Thus, Weber's problem does not arise from his interest in finding a certain linkage between Confucianism and Taoism, and the socio-economic conditions for improving economic activities in China. Rather, it comes from his failure to examine the particular Chinese situation in which several religions co-existed together, their connection with political authority and their influence on the individual's identity formation. This problem also appears when interpreters attempt to 'correct' Weber.

For contextual reasons we took the liberty of substituting the title "**The Social Psychology of the World Religions**" for the original heading "**The Economic Ethic of the World Religions, Comparative Essays in the Sociology of Religion, Introduction.**" We have named this volume *The Religion of China* in order to avoid the isms.(ix) (emphasis added)

In spite of a certain overlap between ethics and the cultural domain, on one side, and Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, on the other, cultural boundaries and religious logics should be separated. In the Chinese context, competing relations between several religions - none of these three religions has unilaterally

dominated religious activities in China - which concern rather different political, personal and natural worlds, provided different relationships between religions and peoples. Therefore, there was a degree of choice for belief, through which people could enjoy rather autonomous religious lives. The predominance of a strong national identity for China above that of religions could thereby be seen.

Weber further commented on East Asian religions and the futures of the Chinese and Japanese economy - 'The Chinese in all probably would be quite capable, probably more capable than the Japanese, of assimilating capitalism which has technically and economically been fully developed in the modern culture area. It is obviously not a question of deeming the Chinese "naturally ungifted" for the demands of capitalism.(p.248)' However, it will be beyond my remit to delve further into this aspect of Weber's work. My dominant research direction will be based mainly on a typological comparison between civilizational elements in the sociology of religion and a comparative-historical sociology that draws on Weber's contributions.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter describes the overall role of Neo-Confucianism - which heavily informed the political and intellectual world in Chosun<sup>3</sup> - rather than investigating

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2) Spickard (1998), for example, summarizes the dominant theoretical concerns in the sociology of religion under the influence of the Weberian tradition: on religious authority, secularization and rational choice. He further draws a conclusion that these three paradigms operate within a narrow sociological understanding of Confucianism as religion. For earlier and broader review on critical appraisals of Weber's sociology of religions, see Eisenstadt (1971).

3) 'Chosun (조선朝鮮)' as the name of the state of the Korean nation has

its ethical contribution to economic development, despite its influence on economic activities. Its protagonists engaged in political discourses on the subject of state reforms for economic policy and regulated and deregulated economic policies by putting forward their own alternatives within the broad framework of Neo-Confucianism. When dealing with the collapse of 'Koryo (고려高麗)' (918-1392), the emergence of 'Chosun' in 1392 and its early state formation process until the early sixteenth century, it is important to identify how the political elite in these periods of the Neo-Confucian world developed the state system, one with quite different characteristics from previous states. Since the mid-sixteenth century, Chosun entered a stage of long-term political stability, with a well-structured state ideology, in spite of a few wars with neighboring states

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been used for a long time by several states in different historical time periods: (? - 108); (1392-1897); (1948 - ?). One of the reasons why the new state in the fourteenth century used Chosun for its name was to declare its succession to political authenticity from the ancient state, Chosun (아사달?), which had been widely mentioned as the first state in Korean history (HAN Yeong-U, 1989). Chosun, as the official name of the state is also being used by the North Korean state in the contemporary political scene for the same reason. In order to minimize confusion in indicating one of the states from the three above, scholars in Korean studies have widely adopted the different names for them: Ancient Chosun (고조선古朝鮮); Chosun/Yi Dynasty/ Yi Chosun; Chosun/North Korea (북한北韓). These different usages would raise a hermeneutical problem when the conceptual clarification between the state and the forms of state are confused, when the subjective categorization conflicts with an objective/non subjective one. In this thesis, Chosun is only used to indicate the state that was built in 1392 and abolished in 1897. See AHN Cheon (1990) for a discussion of this issue.

and the ideological and political conflicts among Confucian literati in domestic politics. Finally, the political protagonists of Neo-Confucianism in Chosun were confronted by a number of philosophical, political and socio-economic challenges from critical Confucian literati and the common people, a situation that became critical when confronted with the new international circumstances of the nineteenth century.

### **1.1. Neo-Confucianism as the driving force of building the new nation-state, Chosun**

#### ***1.1.1. (De)Contextualization of the nation-state system for Korean experience***

It has been suggested that for the social sciences, the emergence of the nation-state and its status for international relations constitute the 'modern' phenomena originating in Europe, that have expanded to other regions of the world. Giddens (1985), despite his clarification of the European/Western nation-state as the object of historical inquiry, distinguished it from other forms of nation-state, and his comparative interpretation of the characteristics of the modern state and its traditional counterparts barely touches upon the question of what the particular historical circumstance of Europe was in which the nation-state phenomenon became a 'modern' one. The importance of the new nation-state system in Europe - at least since the French revolution which deeply influenced the development of the social sciences and vice versa - is generally recognized, but is it not also important to know what kinds of state system had been developing in other regions *until the European one(s) reached to them?* Can they be easily included in the category of 'the traditional state' as against the 'modern nation-state'?

Although Korea had no distinctive city-states comparable with German and

Italian counterparts, it could be argued that Korea has had the tradition of one nation-state since Koryo became the unique Korean state after the collapse of Balhae (발해渤海), located in the northern part of the Korean peninsula and Manchu (만주滿洲) in 926 and the collapse of Silla (신라新羅) in 935. In spite of the fact that Koryo was a sovereign state - or perhaps semi-sovereign state or satellite state of Yuan, since the Chinese world was dominated by the Mongolian empire, Yuan (원元) - for more than four hundred years, Koryo's political system shared greater similarity with previous states than did Chosun. Although the Koryo state could be classified as a sort of nation-state, in terms of the representation of ethnic Koreans, its political characteristics were based on the aristocratic style of central politics. As the primary social class, the aristocrats dominated the highest levels of the state, a few powerful families practically ruled over an unstable regional political situation with their own military power. Economic devastation caused by a number of wars was long-lasting, due to the lack of reformative vision by the ruling class. The latter constituted the local power with their own military and economic resources which were relatively independent from the central state. The kingship was powerless for a long time in the face of several military coups. The administrative power of Confucian bureaucrats was only significant when connected with other political actors, the military elite, aristocrats, Buddhist priests or the kingship.<sup>4</sup>

During its late period from the twelfth to fourteenth century, Koryo was shaped by a series of unstable political situations in regional politics as well as domestic politics from which the Neo-Confucian Literati class (신진사대부新進士大夫)

4) For an understanding of the overall political situation in the Koryo period, see KIM Jong-Seo et al. *Koryosa Jeolyo* (고려사절요) (1442/1977).



emerged. As the administrative class in the state, they confronted the aristocrats over state affairs dealing with Buddhism and economic reform. This political tension became more serious around the time of the emergence of the new regional political situation in East Asia - the contraction of Yuan (원元), the Mongol empire, and the emergence of Ming(명明) in the Chinese world. The unstable political situation in the East Asian continent had a big impact on Koryo in turn. Since Tang (당唐) collapsed in 907, the Northern Chinese region and Manchu were shaped by the rise and fall of several states. For example, Liao (요遼) (916/946-1125) and Jin (금金)'s enlargement and decline, Song (송宋)'s construction (960) and collapse in 1127 (North Song), and in 1279 (South Song), the emergence of the Mongol empire, Yuan (원元) and its collapse (1271-1368), Ming (명明)'s construction in 1368 and so on.<sup>5</sup> Alongside this international situation, domestic politics was also shaped by several political upheavals. Such as several revolts and coups in 1009, 1126, 1135, 1170, 1198, a number of wars within the territory and near the border with Liao (요遼) in 1019, with Jin (금金) in 1107, with the Mongols over the period 1231-1274, with Japanese pirates (왜구倭寇) over 1376-1389<sup>6</sup>, with the Red Turban bandits (홍건적紅巾賊) over 1359-1361, and so forth.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence of Ming's demand for northern areas that had been occupied by the Mongol empire, a group of the military, loyal to general CHOI Young (최영), decided to conquer LiaoDong (요동遼東), over the border from Koryo. However, an opposing group around LEE Sung-Gye (이성

5) For an understanding of the history of the states in the Chinese world and their relevance to Koryo politics, see Franke and Twitchett (1994) and Mote and Twitchett (1988).

6) For an understanding of the issue of Japanese pirates (왜구倭寇) for diplomatic relations between Japanese and Korean states in the fourteenth century, see Kawazoe (1990).

7) See, BANG Dong-In (1995) and KIM Wi-Hyun (1995) for Liao in Koryo politics; YOON Yong-Hyuk (1995) for the Mongol empire.

계), who controlled the field troops, finally rejected the conquest plan in the Wehwa (위화) island and succeeded in attaining political power, having gotten rid of the opposing state elite. Having gained political power, the military group together with Neo-Confucian bureaucrats focused on domestic economic issues concerning the reform of agricultural lands (과전법): they introduced a new cadastral survey, established rights for farmers, and changed tax rates, and so on. The return of the army from Wehwa island in 1388 should be seen as a turning point for the enlarged political activities of Neo-Confucian Literati in the state. For the economic reforms, some of the radical Neo-Confucian literati, who had suffered from strong aristocratic dominance in the state and who were ranked as second class, now became part of the new political order. The emergence of a new state power and the introduction of a new administrative and political vision through economic reform policies must be regarded as the epochal demand for Neo-confucian visions (HAN Yeong-U, 1989).

In spite of the introduction of Confucianism over a long period in the Korean political world, it had mainly functioned as the overall guideline for dealing with political matters of the administrative elite. It was rather Buddhism that predominated. Since its introduction in the fourth century it had spread widely as the religion with the clear idea of 'this world', 'other worlds' and ultimately nirvana. Koryo, especially, supported Buddhism with the national ceremony, Palgwanhoe (팔관회) (AHN Jee-Won, 2001), and some Buddhist priests were heavily involved in politics; SHIN Don (신돈), for example. One characteristic of Buddhism was the trans-ethical attitude on mundane issues, which was criticized by the Neo-Confucian literati, whose main intellectual interest was to reconstruct the state and social relations among the people based on a strong ethical system. Chou Hsi's original Neo-Confucian project was one of distancing himself from Buddhism and Taoism and restoring a discipline-oriented individual

ethics, through the reinterpretation of classical texts dealing with philosophy, ethics, etiquette and education. JEONG Do-Jeon (정도전), the leading light of the Confucian political group advocating Chosun, tried to criticize Buddhist doctrine, pointing to their philosophical contradictions (JEONG Do-Jeon, 1397/1977; HAN Yeong-U, 1989). A number of anti-Buddhist policies were also introduced by Neo-Confucian bureaucrats at the beginning of Chosun. The new kingship and Neo-Confucian bureaucrats displayed different attitudes to Buddhism, however. Unlike the Neo-Confucian bureaucrats and literati, the kingship of Chosun understood some Buddhist ceremonies for the royal family as disabolishable royal rituals. The disagreement on Buddhism between the kingship and Neo-Confucian bureaucrats from time to time became a source of political conflict between them.

The emergence of Chosun was also an important event for regional politics. The Chinese state, Ming, and the Korean state, Chosun, began to have a peaceful relationship after the fifteenth century. In fact, before the emergence of Chosun in Korea and of Ming in China, the relationship among several states of both ethnics were considerably conflictive. Their predecessors before the tenth century had fought each other several times over territorial interest in Manchu, LiaoDong and the Korean peninsula. Ming's demand for the northern area of Koryo, and the counter-response from Koryo to conquer Liao-dong were the final part of the story. After small disputes, Ming and Chosun finally agreed to a peaceful co-existence through the symbolic acknowledgement of an asymmetric relationship between them: Ming as the empire for the region, Chosun as the kingdom of the peninsula. This relationship reached its zenith in the sixteenth and seventeenth century with the invasion of Chosun by Japan, and the collapse of Ming by Qing(淸) in China. The intellectual discourse in seventeenth-century Chosun in relation to the above will be introduced in the later part of this chapter.

Chosun, as the nation-state, has at least two characteristics - both institutional and constitutive - which require it to be treated differently from previous states in Korean history. Above all, the political authority of the central state successfully extended its administrative power into the provinces. The formation of a strong central state was possible because the political elite of Chosun intended to totally change the power base of the previous state, which meant the end of the aristocracy and of local powers who could tackle monarchical power. Additionally, while the leading military group around LEE Sung-Gye formed the central power in the state, supporting Neo-Confucian bureaucrats initiated administrative reforms rather than making their own military and economic power base. The dual forces of building Chosun - military power and Neo-Confucian bureaucrats - later built a political structure of royal power and ministerial power in tension.

Above all, ... , the establishment of the Chosun dynasty was a moral and intellectual venture that set out to prove itself by articulating a sociopolitical program that would give the new dynasty a firm Confucian basis. It signified a felicitous conjunction between the ideological orientation of progressive reformers on the one hand, the pragmatic aims of the military on the other. In a true sense, it was the Korean rendition of the celebrated Confucian concept of "renovation" (*Yusin*). (Deuchler, 1992: 92)

Further, the political elite of Chosun declared the relevance of socio-economic agendas to solve moral issues, in order to gain political justification for the revolutionary change of state (역성혁명 易性革命) - in some ways comparable to the concept of a successful revolt or *coup d'etat*. Political upheaval provoked an intense debate among the Neo-Confucian literati. Chosun was the first state which emerged as an alternative to the previous state that was devoid of territorial conflict or (civil) wars among the states. It can be understood as the replacement of one state by another, rather than conquest, victory, enlargement, absorption or unification by one state. In spite of the fact that Chosun's emerging process also

demonstrated a political elimination of members of the previous ruling classes, including royal families, it also forced Neo-Confucian literati to 'intellectually' respond to the issue of the change of political authority. It was the ethical issue that was of overriding importance for the Neo-Confucian literati, who were taught to act as a sort of political advisor to kingship, rather than participating in any political activities against kingship. The provocative debate by bipolarized Neo-Confucian Literati between advocacy of the reform of Koryo with a securing of its political authority and the change of the state authority itself for more radical policies, led to the development of ethics and moral codes for the literati, both for and against political participation, rather than any military idea of a coup, etc. Besides, this experience for an intellectual group founded upon an intellectual, and at the same time, political tradition, resulted in both a political activism with 'moral' justification and distance from central politics with 'moral' criticism. The origin of the 'political' spectrum for the Neo-Confucian literati, which fundamentally determined the direction of Chosun's politics also began with the issue of how a new state, Chosun, could be built.

### ***1.1.2 An origin of Korean civil society?: the relationship between kingship and the Confucian literati***

What is the nature of East Asian politics? For some social scientists and philosophers oriented toward identifying particular political characteristics of the East Asian world, such a question has been partly answered through the observation of a political system centered around kingship and the lack of constitutional elements, which had emerged in Europe from the seventeenth century onwards. Also, they saw a rigid social hierarchy, which was reminiscent of a political system of absolute monarchy that Europe had already overcome, or at least a particular type of '(Oriental) despotism'. Many of them could not find any form of democracy in the East Asian context. The elements of 'civil society'

ranged against the 'authoritarian' state that emerged in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, seemed to have no equivalents in East Asia.

However, CHO Hein (1997) refutes this conventional view on 'oriental' despotism in Confucian political history for Chosun. For Cho, while the development of the 'check and balance' system among political parties is crucial for understanding the origin of English civil society, and the role of *Bildungsbergertum* rather than the bourgeoisie, for understanding the German version, the Confucian literati in Chosun represent the same political force for Korean civil society. He argues that the Confucian literati class as bureaucrats, local influentials, the 'backwoods literati' (사림士林), critics of state policies and monitors of the kingship, had autonomous political power in the pursuit of righteousness in moral terms rather than rights in legal terms. In addition, the diversification of political and ethical visions within the literati class contributed to forming party politics from the sixteenth century on. Cho's introduction of the traditional form of Korean civil society from the comparative perspective as a corrective to the common view on Confucian politics is widely accepted in Korean Studies.

In fact, it was usually the king who obeyed the officials rather than the other way around. Confucian officials were actually rendering the kingship obedient to them; they were doing the opposite of "obedience" to the king. One thing that most Western observers of Confucian thought have failed to recognize is the precept of remonstrance, which is linked to the precept of loyalty in Confucian tradition. (p. 29)

In fact, it would not be incorrect to identify the relationship between the kingship and the Confucian literati class as a whole, on the one hand, and the internal conflict among several groups of Neo-Confucian bureaucrats and literati, on the other, as the key for understanding how Neo-Confucianism was practiced in Chosun politics. However, in spite of Cho's assertion of them as the historical origin of civil society in Korea, it remains questionable whether one can

conceptually reconstruct these traditional features within the theory of civil society in the social sciences.<sup>8</sup>

It is misguided to suggest that the Confucian literati are more important than the military group around LEE Sung-gye for the political destruction of Koryo and the building of Chosun. The military group needed intellectual support, without which their political revolt could not be justified. At the same time, the Confucian Literati - who wanted a discipline-oriented social ethics based on Neo-Confucianism, having distanced themselves from the Buddhist and Taoist ways of social interpretation - also needed new power for the state. Thus, at the time of the emerging Chosun, new political power was wrested by the combination of military power and intellectual knowledge. However, while the territorial expansion to the North, the maintenance of a well-organized military power, the development of a central administrative system, the full institutionalization of bureaucracy, and the stability of kingship, emerged and considered in the 200 years after the emergence of Chosun, the balance of power among the two groups began to shift to the Neo-Confucian group of high bureaucrats, despite their involvement in several struggles over the succession to the throne in the fifteenth century. At the same time, military power became subsumed under the kingship and the Neo-Confucian bureaucrats.

Ironically, this political tension between kingship and the Confucian bureaucrats led to a much more symbolic role for both political actors within the Neo-Confucian paradigm. This indirectly means that in any political debate on state affairs, including royal rituals, the protagonists should present their arguments according to Neo-Confucian principles in order to justify their claims.

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8) For an understanding of the debate on civil society in Korean studies, see SHIN Jong-Hwa (2000).

The king and members of the royal family had to have a comprehensive knowledge of the Confucian Bibles - the sage kings of ancient China and their achievements were regarded as the ideal prototype - upon which they should base their political and ethical behavior, and according to which, the objections of bureaucrats and local literati could be refuted. Without this, they would be subjected to a serious monitoring and interference regarding the 'ethical codes of kingship'. In the name of a better moral politics by the king for the people, the literati also risked death in submitting any criticism on kingship. The political clash at the same time meant an intellectual conflict with the Confucian text, with kingship, the bureaucrats, and the backwood literati. The idea of the state as the symbolic center of politics for the people, however, was never contested by them. Political authority, which forced political actors to obey, came neither from the physical power of the state, nor from the present form of kingship, nor from economic power. Rather, it derived from ethical codes and taught morality for disciplining individuals. In other words, all major political actors were trapped in self-imposed values and disciplines. This meant that bureaucrats with a more extensive knowledge of Neo-Confucian doctrines were more readily promoted in the state. The later entrance of the backwoods literati - Sarim(사림+林) - in the central state around the end of the fifteenth century, reflects their positions as descendents of the Neo-Confucian Literati who had rejected participation in the political revolt for Chosun at the end of Koryo, and who later turned their backs on the central politics of the new state. They had economic backgrounds in the Southern and Middle provinces, influenced Confucian ethics in their local areas, and received wide normative support, especially when central politics was in crisis. After a series of intellectual and political conflicts with the dominant political chain of high bureaucrats - Hungu-pa(훈구파勳舊派) - on ethical issues, royal ceremonies and other policy issues, they finally became the main political and intellectual group from the late sixteenth century onwards.<sup>9</sup>



One of the most common criticisms of Chosun politics has been that the monarchy system was the source of rigid class hierarchy. It is certainly true that autonomous political activities with a democratic orientation could not be fully developed towards a politics of the democratic constitution. For the Neo-Confucian literati class, in order to make their own political roles, they had to limit their status below that of the kingship. Above all, in the (Neo-)Confucian doctrines, the kingship should be firmly based on peoples' support, and the kingship was never free from a dutiful contribution to the improvement of peoples' lives. The role of the Confucian literati was that of advisors, to deliver peoples' voices to the king and to guide the kingship toward a moral politics. The literati and the people accepted the higher political authority of kingship, but also expected and demanded a 'qualified' political contribution for them. For the kingship, this relationship could also be interpreted as a give-and-take process for receiving fidelity from subjects, on condition that he should accept the premise that the ultimate foundation of kingship comes from the people: his obligation is to improve their lives. In spite of restricted political power, kingship was the symbol of the state itself, which could not be doubted by any political actors until the late nineteenth century. Some critical literati concluded that political problems in the state did not arise from a monarchy that was too powerful, but rather, from the lack of power of kingship in the face of serious factional politics and a disordered

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9) HAN Yeong-U (1989: 258-262) differentiates Neo-Confucianism for landowners from Neo-Confucianism for farmers. The *Sarim* group, is regarded as for the former, while JEONG Do-Jeon, the leading political intellectual for the building of Chosun state in the late fourteenth century, is understood as the most prominent Confucian literatus for the latter. Further, Han understands *Silhak* tradition in the late Chosun period as the extension of Neo-Confucianism for farmers.

social hierarchy. For example, Chung yak-yong (정약용) (1762-1836) proposed a direct return to the ancient classics, rather than following the interpretation of the Neo-Confucian tradition, so as to identify the genuine role of sage kings in ancient China, and in order to improve the rigid bureaucracy and to end the factional politics of the Confucian class (CHONG Yag-yong, 1997; KIM Tae-Young, 1997; BAE Byung-Sam, 1996b, 1993). Also, many in the alternative intellectual flow, the so-called practical learning school (실학과實學派) - which will be dealt with in chapter 2 - emphasized the economic contribution of kingship to peoples' lives, distinguished from an idealized formality and social ethics, as the solution for rescuing a kingship surrounded by Neo-Confucian adherents. Local people directed their spleen toward the administrative officers and (Confucian) yangban class in their community, rather than toward the kingship - one important exception being the *HongKyongnae* Rebellion (1811-1812) - this political event will be investigated in chapter 2.

### 1.2. The sources of long-term political stability of Chosun

Chosun lasted for 506 years (1392-1897).<sup>10</sup> The long duration of Chosun is rather an extraordinary case compared to any nation-state in Europe, and even in the East Asian context (Deuchler, 1997; Woodside, 1998). After two hundred years Chosun had stable political structures with a rigid social hierarchy, had firmly rooted central politics into the local area with an administrative structure, introduced a number of economic policies on property, augmented land for cultivation, reformed old tax rates for farmers, changed the currency, and so forth. The political authority that the kingship of Chosun was endowed with, which had

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10) The empire of Great Korea (대한제국大韓帝國) (1897-1910), the self-transformed state from Chosun, should be treated as a different political system, otherwise the modernity discourse in Korean studies would lose a major element.

initially been rejected by some Confucian Literati and some of the common people, was no longer a crucial political issue. Despite several military conflicts with the Jurchen (Yeojin여진女眞) tribes near the northern border, and Japanese pirates in the southern ports, Chosun did not experience war on a national scale - which had quite frequently occurred in Koryo - until the end of the sixteenth century. However, at the same time, the stable economic and political structure began to encounter new problems. As already mentioned, the intellectual and political conflicts among the Neo-Confucian bureaucrats and literati were at first very serious, but became less so, as the issue of the legitimation of the state gradually moved toward policy issues. Secondly, the domination of economic power by the (Confucian) yangban class, thanks to the extension of hereditary lands for bureaucrats, was also internally criticized by new bureaucrats, as a negative symbol of strong class hierarchy. In spite of the existence of dissatisfied political groups, a serious crisis of the state, which should be differently understood from a crisis of royal affairs, never occurred.

Through the observation of previous cases of crisis of the state in Korean history, we see that war had been the main factor in the change of state. Even when war did not change the political authority, it quite often produced a change of hegemonic group, which accelerated the collapse of the state. However, in Chosun's case any crisis of state provoked by war with its neighbors did not lead to the replacement of state authority. The lack of an alternative political power to kingship was the reason for this stability. The consequence was rather a strengthening of the authority of Chosun, aided by many Neo-Confucian intellectuals' contribution, although kingship began to lose power in post-war faction politics.

At the end of the sixteenth century (1592-1599) and the early seventeenth century

(1627, 1636), Chosun experienced invasions by the Japanese and Manchurian states. The wars with Japan (1592-1599) and Post-Jin (후금後金)/Qing (청淸) (1627, 1636) made significant impacts not only on politics and the economic situation, but also on the intellectual geography. The wars produced two consequences for politics: increased internal conflict among political factions, but also emerging strong national identity with pride in the civilizational superiority over neighboring (barbarian) states. In economics, the budget crisis of the state caused by the loss of tax revenue - due to the destruction of records and related documents in the wars - had the long-term consequence of motivating productivity, which ultimately caused economic and social transformation in the late Chosun period, while introducing several reformative policies for taxation. The influences of the wars on the intellectual world could be largely understood in two ways: firstly, central politics came to be dominated by factions of strong normativists as a consequence of political disputes among the Neo-Confucian literati; secondly, new interpretations of economic issues in Confucianism and the emergence of the practical learning school, *silhak-pa* (실학과實學派). The political and, at the same time, intellectual debate on the conquest of Qing (淸淸) and the debate on the royal ceremonies ended with the victory of the normativists, who argued a moral politics based on Neo-Confucian principles. Politically, they dominated major ministries including the chief committee for the military (비변사), and produced strong faction politics based on their intellectual ties. Many literati became the victims of political practices instigated by the advocates of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy. Eventually some literati began to doubt Neo-Confucian politics and the corruption amongst the ruling yangban class. The gap between Confucian norms in theory and their vulnerability in practice, was highlighted as the problem of faction politics. For the post-war economy, the literati as bureaucrats, local community leaders or exiled intellectuals, produced a number of plans and policies for land, taxes, social classes including slaves,

domestic commerce, foreign trade and so on. Around these economic and social issues, some reformative literati identified serious differences between the normative framework and practical solutions (Palais, 1996).

The flow of dominant political factions in central politics from the late sixteenth century to the late eighteenth century shows how Chosun's Confucian world maintained orthodox Neo-Confucianism through several internal struggles (CHUNG Man-Jo, 1994). Firstly, the emergence of *the Northern Faction* (북인) after seven years of war with Japan, which included a number of leaders of the righteous armies. Then, *the Western Faction* (서인) - the protagonists of pro-Ming against post-Jin/Qing in regional politics - after a royal coup (인조반정) in 1623. Here, thirdly, is found the overall dominance of *the Old Doctrine* (노론), that emerged from the 1680s on and from which the so-called 'theory of little China' developed. As CHO Hein argued, the emergence, change and separation of Confucian political actors could be understood as the particular expression of Chosun's party politics. On a comparative view of Chinese, Japanese and Korean politics at that time, the long duration of conflictive Confucian politics in Chosun could be understood as the unique phenomenon through which Neo-Confucianism maintained, not only its political influence, but also its intellectual power, while in China and Japan, Neo-Confucian doctrines began to lose their philosophical interest in the intellectual world.

#### ***1.2.1. Civilization, Barbarianism and the formation of national identity***

One of the oldest asymmetric counter-concepts in the tradition of historical-political semantics in European thought is 'Hellenes versus Barbarians' (Koselleck, 1985). For ancient Greek thinkers, this dichotomy was used to identify the existence of spatially separated groups - the members of the polis and others - and to highlight the distinctiveness of Greek culture from others at first,

but later, to develop a cosmopolitan idea of 'the Hellenes', until it was replaced by another dichotomy, 'Christians versus Heathens'. A similar conceptualization also existed for a long time in the Chinese world- surrounded by the Barbarians in the East (동이 東夷), West (서용 西戎), South (남만 南蠻) and North (북적 北狄) - for which the Korean world was understood as Eastern Barbarian.<sup>11</sup>

Both the Western and Eastern idea are based on an asymmetric relationship that qualifies one and disqualifies the other. The ancient Korean perception until Koryo - and whether it was singular or plural - of themselves and even the Chinese world and others is unclear. It is no doubt true, however, that Chosun, since its emergence in the fourteenth century, had limited its own political position to one standing behind Ming, which it accepted as the hegemonic power for the region, but also as the country with a superior cultural and intellectual heritage for the Confucian idea. This became even more evident after the failure of the political literati to conquer LiaoDong (요동 遼東). Through several symbolized diplomatic rituals, this asymmetric relationship between Chosun, as a king's state and Ming as the empire of the region, was maintained until Ming collapsed and was succeeded by Qing.

However, the relationship between Chosun and the political powers in the Japanese islands and Manchu had not been fully customized as a formal diplomatic relationship between states. Rather, it was mainly maintained as an economic relationship between Chosun and local powers in southern Japan, and Chosun and some tribes in Manchu. Above all, this limited economic relationship expressed the fact that these counterparts - the Japanese state and Manchurian semi-states - suffered from internal political crises and had underdeveloped

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11) For an understanding of the political relationship between the Hans and northern nomads in Chinese history, see Waldron (1990).

central state structures in the early Chosun period. Besides, for Chosun, Japan and Manchu had no significance for the Confucian literati's intellectual and cultural interests. While Chosun enjoyed close ties with Ming, with relatively frequent delegations, it merely maintained an underdeveloped formal relationship with Japan and Manchu, with economic trade in selected areas on the coast and near the border.

For Chosun, the emergence of the Tokugawa Bakufu (막부幕府) in Japan at the beginning of the seventeenth century was regarded as the emergence of its proper diplomatic counterpart, which would leave Chosun's coastal areas undisturbed, while the Tokugawa Shogun, as the rising dominant power in Japan also looked for international recognition so as to maintain its political stability. The relationship between Chosun and Tokugawa Bakufu was peacefully maintained for about two hundred years, with a number of visits of official delegates. However, whereas Chosun's delegates could arrive at Edo, with a journey that passed through southern Japan, Japanese delegates were prevented from reaching Seoul (한양) in Chosun. The latter's journey in land was restricted, in order to prevent them from collecting information that may possibly be useful for another military campaign. The diplomatic convention insisted upon by Chosun was that trade exchange took place in the coastal region. For the state elite in Chosun, economic trade and formal delegations to Japan were a necessary measure for minimizing the risk of another war (LEE Jin-Hee, 1986).

In 1623, a Neo-Confucian group, the *Western faction* (서인) installed a new king through a coup. They revolted against KwanghaeKun (광해군), who had sought a balanced position for Chosun between Ming and Post-Jin (후금後金)(that later became Qing (청清)), criticizing his amoral behavior in some royal affairs and his poor post-war policies. The new king and his network of bureaucrats, however,

failed to achieve peace for Chosun, because their support for Ming led to two invasions by Post-Jin and Qing. The disappearance of Ming and its replacement by the superior force of Qing, forced Chosun to accept a new asymmetric relationship between Qing and Chosun.

Peoples' memories of the war with Japan and Qing, at the end of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, contributed greatly to the hostile attitude toward these countries.<sup>12</sup> The dichotomy of Chosun and Ming as against Japan and Qing was a significant effect of the wars.<sup>13</sup> The discriminative mode of narration can also be discovered in intellectual discourses on history, culture and ethics. Such racism cannot be explained purely in terms of a revengeful response to political aggression. By siding with Ming in its war with Japan, many Confucian literati asserted the moral response as compensation for Ming's previous military aid, and thus rejected Qing's demand for alliance, planning instead a war with Qing for the restoration of Ming. Both a shared intellectual inclination to Confucianism and its related political and ethical claims, and the evidence of this in Ming's military aid, meant that the dichotomy between the 'cultured' state and the 'barbarian' state was reinforced in intellectual discourse. The replacement of Ming by Qing in the Chinese world was understood by Chosun's Confucian literati as the collapse of

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12) See Haboush (2001) for a literary discourse on the memo<sub>고</sub> of the wars in the seventeenth century.

13) In fact, ethnic racism against the Japanese and the Jurchen (Yeojin여진) - later the Manchurians - who built Qing, had a long history. It seems to have been an inescapable byproduct of a number of territorial conflicts with Jurchen (Yeojin여진), and the exposure to Japanese pirates. However, it is necessary to mention that racism toward other ethnics, the Mongols and the Hans - known as 'the Chinese' to the Western world -, for example, had also existed for the same political reasons.



the civilized world into barbarianism. This new political situation provoked them to reinterpret the idea of China as the center of the world which had been based on a territorial, cultural, and to some extent philosophical claim. The thinking of Chosun as little China (소중화사상 小中華思想) at that time was based on the idea of a cultural civilizational form, now transferred from the Chinese world to the Korean. The philosophical response from the conservative Neo-Confucian thinkers was thus to more firmly embed Neo-Confucian ethical doctrines<sup>14</sup> and national policy agendas became strictly focused on the realization of Neo-Confucianism in the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century. The disappearance of Ming acted as a catalyst, encouraging a renewed interest in the history of the Korean nation and national culture throughout the eighteenth century.

Until Chosun revised its diplomatic relations with Japan in 1876, it maintained a minimalist position in international relations with the seclusion policy (쇄국정책 鎖國政策). While 'westerners used the word "secluded" to describe a country that lacked foreign relations in the modern sense' and 'the word had a negative and anti-foreign connotation which implied an unenlightened view of the outside world' (Deuchler, 1977: 1), for Chosun's state elite, who regarded Chosun as the successor of Chinese cultural civilization, the seclusion policy was not only an important political instrument but also a cultural one. Although the *sadae* (사대 事大) - literally: serving a superior - relationship to Qing in political affairs, was effected in a ritualized diplomatic manner, in order to minimize political instability in the region, Chosun did not welcome any cultural influence from Qing. For this reason, excepting the state envoys who visited Qing two or three times per year, Chosun discouraged people from visiting Qing (Cumings, 1997).

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14) See, Yang and Ahn (1998) for SONG Si-Yeol's case.

In the debate on Japanese seclusion policy in the Tokugawa period, Kato (1981) argues that it is a seclusion policy that paved the distinctive path Japan followed in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, compared to the European one, whereas in his earlier comparison he sees a similar path for some of the West European countries and Japan in the first half of the second millennium, which could be extensively understood as a version of the Jasperian idea of historical synchronism over different civilizational boundaries (Jaspers, 1953).

'The contrast between East [Japan] and West [western Europe] fell out along the following lines: the social energy of the westernmost extremity of Eurasia directed itself toward unending expansion, while the easternmost extremity suddenly turned itself toward contraction, **but maintaining an unlimited possibility for expansion.** In my opinion, the essential point of departure between modern Europe and Japan is to be identified in the way each elected to go down opposite paths-one toward expansion, the other toward contraction.' (Kato, 1981) (emphasis added, quoted from the internet version)

In spite of the fact that his conclusive claims for what Japan achieved in the Tokugawa period - which are understood by himself as the foundation of Japanese culture and the collective mentality in modern Japan - can be criticized, both empirically and normatively, the seclusion policy maintained by the Tokugawa Bakufu, in terms of founding the long-term political stability of the state, could be helpful for understanding the political and cultural orientation of Chosun in its reluctance to engage in extensive international relations with Qing and Tokugawa Bakufu, above all, in its single-minded application with a view to advancing national culture and concentrating on domestic socio-political agendas.

However, the dual development of the idea of civilizational superiority and of deep concerns in the national identity did not always coalesce. While anti-Qing bureaucrats intended to minimize cultural influences from Qing, some anti-Neo-Confucian literati began to show a deep interest in material civilization, as

well as in the rediscovery of the ancient history of the Korean nation. Besides, in intercourse with Qing some literati in the eighteenth century, on discovering advanced means of production and agricultural tools, had to solve the dilemma of choosing between the practical interests of economic development and a normative distancing from the 'barbarian' state. For PARK Je-Ga (박제가) and Park Ji-Won (박지원), for example, Qing came to be regarded as the new 'China' (중화中華) that had an advanced economy from which Chosun had to learn: they even began to doubt the idea of the center of the world and a hierarchical order for it (PARK Je-Ga, 1971; PARK Ji-Won, 1977; KANG Don-Ku, 1992).

In fact, the intellectual dilemma over Confucianism was clearly reflected in different self-interpretations of Chosun's ideological and historical foundation in the late Chosun period. Despite the different roles assigned to Confucianism by various political elites, it had been ingrained as the state ideology since Chosun's conception. Initially, the fundamental limitation of Confucian ideology existed through the Neo-Confucian doctrines that unquestioningly accepted Chinese hegemony for Chosun's political and intellectual world. The political and intellectual history of China was the only 'reference point' and available source as 'promissory note' (see, Wittrock, 2000, 1998 for an explication) for Chosun's elite. Ironically, this dependence was firmly rooted in Chosun's intellectual world after the disappearance of the Chinese state. However, when the thought of little China encouraged the Confucian world to rethink Chosun's ideological foundation, the work of actual description of the historical foundation of Chosun could not fail to identify the long-lasting political tension between the Chinese world and the Korean and the existence of independent Korean states in history.

#### **Conclusion: Intellectual bureaucracy in Chosun**

Compared to the history of states in the Chinese world, most states in Korean

history endured, spanning a period of more than four hundred years - excepting Balhae's case of 229 years. The overall cycle of the rise and fall of the Korean states does not exactly coincide with the fate the Chinese and Japanese states, even though regional politics accompanied by the occurrence of wars, in many cases seriously provoked a crisis of state sovereignty. Although the reasons for the long duration of the Korean states need to be investigated, this would be complicated comparative work, in which geographical, political, economic, military and intellectual elements would have different repercussions, according to the location of states in the East Asian region. Accordingly, once the focus is narrowed to the Korean context, it becomes possible to see the transformative relation between the state and major political actors in terms of the rise and fall of Chosun.

This chapter dealt with transformation from a state-perspective, the next, will be considered from an actor-perspective. The emergence of Neo-Confucian bureaucrats as a new political power, coinciding with Chosun's genesis, and their continuing hegemonic dominance of the political world has already been argued. This was accompanied by the disappearance of Buddhism in the political sphere. Classical Confucian ideas became a more practical doctrine for state affairs and social ethics under the Neo-Confucian paradigm. Among the three major ideal-types of human beings in Confucian discourse - sage king (성왕/군聖王/君), sage person (聖人) and loyal courtier (충신忠臣) -, the Neo-Confucian bureaucrats and literati only assumed the role of loyal courtiers who should dutifully help the king with the sage persons' word. In reality, however, helping the king, in many cases, turn into a limiting of the king's power, because the Confucian bureaucrats and literati had enough knowledge to directly mobilize Neo-Confucian doctrine for state affairs.

S. N. EISENSTADT's brief description of the Confucian intellectual world in Chosun and its relationship with the ruling aristocracy, compared to its Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese counterparts, barely succeeded in grasping the essence of Confucian politics in Chosun:

**In Korea, by partial contrast, Confucian elites have never achieved the kind of autonomy and independence that characterized the Chinese empire. Aristocratic and patrimonial tendencies remained very strong. The Confucians encountered strong Buddhist opposition, in alliance with large sectors of the older aristocracy and some of the rulers. Once the Confucian institutions and elites became predominant, however, even the aristocracy was "Confucianized". True enough, aristocratic families and lineages continued to be much more important in Korea than in post-Tang China. But their importance was manifest in their success in monopolizing, at least in part, the Confucian bureaucratic literati positions - but not in abolishing these positions - and in reverting to a distinct "semifeudal" aristocratic type of polity.** (emphasis added) (Eisenstadt, 1996a: 176)

I have argued here that the breakdown of the aristocratic system in Koryo and the emergence of Chosun were the political products of Confucian intellectuals and politicians and therefore, that Chosun should be treated differently from previous states. Besides, the internal conflict within the Confucian literati and bureaucrats was another feature of Neo-Confucian politics in Chosun and because of this, the stable settlement of the aristocracy was fundamentally impossible. Eisenstadt argues, however, that the long-term maintenance of aristocracy and the political dominance of aristocrats occurred through the institutionalization of Confucianism in Korea - it is unclear whether he refers to Koryo or Chosun. In the next chapter, the dynamics of Confucian politics in Chosun will be compared to the Japanese example. Even though it is true that many 'descents in the aristocratic families' - Deuchler's expression - in Koryo were deeply involved in introducing Confucian-style reformative policies, it should be noted that the Koryo aristocracy collapsed and pro-Mongol and pro-Buddhist aristocrats gained pre-eminence, only to be ousted with the advent of Chosun: they were forced to accept

Neo-Confucianism. More importantly, there is neither clear evidence for a specific class interest for the aristocracy as a whole, nor for any dominant economic interest of the acting Confucians. The merit subjects of Chosun were the qualified Confucian politicians and political intellectuals who were driven by the need to propose and practice reform-oriented policies, while criticizing Koryo for poor socio-economic and ethical conditions.

The term aristocracy has been commonly accepted as a description of the traditional political terrain in Chosun, as a way of indicating the dominant power of the yangban class in the social status system, on the one hand, and of pointing to the problem of a strong social hierarchy, on the other. In fact, it is undoubtedly true that the hierarchical social order and the power of the ruling class determined the direction of socio-economic, political and ethical discourse. However, remarking on the problem of a traditional dynasty and the class system does not fully explain the idiosyncrasy of Confucian society and the state. I suggest here an auxiliary concept, 'intellectual bureaucracy' rather than 'Confucianized aristocracy', in order to grasp Chosun's political characteristics. Chosun's bureaucracy was maintained through an exacting examination system for the Confucian literati. While the examination system had a long history, it was in late Koryo and over the whole period of Chosun, that it became the main method for promulgating the study of Confucian doctrines, which were adopted for higher civil exam agendas. Although there were several professional exams for experts, passing the exams in humanities and Confucian doctrines - 대과(大科) - was crucial for obtaining a prestigious academic title and similarly, to become part of the state elite. Accordingly, high bureaucrats in the state were not simply professionals or experts in their own fields. Rather, they were also the most excellent literati and intellectuals. Therefore, they were accustomed to interpreting state affairs with Confucianist ethical insight. For example, newly introduced

political and cultural programmes for early Chosun; renovation of the state and society, were firmly based on Neo-Confucian doctrines, referring to ancient Chinese models, said to have been operative in ancient Kija (기자箕子) Chosun (Deuchler, 1992). This is also the reason why major political conflicts among Confucian bureaucrats introduced a change of dominant intellectual views and why different interpretations of Confucian rituals and royal affairs frequently provoked political confrontations. In a sense, Chosun's political culture produced many Machiavellian-type politicians, bureaucrats and (exiled) intellectuals, rather than intellectuals outside of the state.

Chosun had an underdeveloped separation between state and religion. For this reason, one could make a comparison between Chosun and pre-modern European states, in terms of underdeveloped secularization. Such a construction of Chosun as a mirror, which was conceptually viable for nineteenth century Protestant missionaries, however, fails to take into account the specificity of Chosun. Firstly, Confucianism in Chosun did not have the professional priests of Christianity and Buddhism to exclusively organize religious rituals. Secondly, the idea of religion in which Confucianism and others religious forms are comparatively understood, and with which religious authority could be located outside of the state did not exist at all. The conceptual vocabularies for identifying diverse religious groups were based on common asymmetric counter-concepts: 'the grand teaching' versus 'harmful heresy'. Thirdly, and most importantly, if I utilize the concept hegemony for understanding power relations between state and religion in Chosun, it is the state that enjoyed power over religion in the political sphere. However, it is true that the conceptual formulation of a politics that is autonomous from religion and vice versa, did not exist in the Confucian world - this will be further discussed in the next chapter. Accordingly, intellectual bureaucracy in Chosun, in a sense, could be regarded as the political instrument of Confucianism which enabled the

political to penetrate the religious sphere, with a strong orientation to ethics.



## 2. The crisis of modernity in Chosun: modernity and the cosmological turn

### **Introduction: Modernity in a pre-modern state?**

Chosun, in the conventional view for Korean Studies, has been understood as a pre-modern state, as much as the social and cultural elements of Chosun society have been regarded as pre-modern. In distinction to the conceptual rupture with which 'modern' counterparts are understood, Chosun has been mapped as 'the last period of pre-modern time' in Korean history. If this overarching view is accepted - in contrast to my suggestions in chapter 1 that the conventional view should be critically evaluated and my contestation of the epochal concept in the introduction as militating against an investigation of modernity in the sense of varieties of radical projects for overcoming given political problems in a pre-modern world - then Chosun must immediately fall into an interpretive antinomy. An empirical overview of what happened in the political sphere during the nineteenth century, undermines the validity of conventional time-zones for the compartmentalization of Korean Studies, within which the epochal distinction of modernity is unquestionably located. Thus, the crisis of modernity in Chosun contains the irony that Chosun is understood as nothing but the pre-modern state.

The crisis of Neo-Confucian politics and its related socio-ethical agendas, had been fermenting in Chosun for some time. Indeed, an argument that it had already begun with the emergence of Chosun would be supported by the political clashes between the kingship and major Confucian bureaucrats that occurred at the end of the fourteenth century: King Taejong (태종 이

방원) versus JEONG Do-Jeon (정도전); King Sejo (세조) versus KIM Jong-Seo (김종서).<sup>1</sup> The long-term process of maintaining the Neo-Confucian political structure, also reveals remarkable internal political and intellectual tensions. This chapter will investigate the political and intellectual flows which might be understood as the source of alternative projects to Neo-Confucian Chosun. These began within the Confucian paradigm, in many cases utilizing Confucian vocabularies, but later absorbed knowledge imported from European and North American civilization, largely under the Chinese and Japanese filtered-lenses of the late nineteenth century. Significantly, the implementation of the Confucian and other traditional projects mainly failed to resolve the political crisis, whereas the implantation of Western projects was highly successful for dealing with the crisis of state sovereignty. In other words, indigenous alternatives were replaced by imported ones that faced little competition under the condition of state crisis and the related radical transformations of Chosun society. However, the rapid expansion of Western projects for a new civilization in Korea was only possible when they appealed to a widely spread and already matured societal mood for criticizing Neo-Confucian social and political structures. Further, the collapse of Chosun under colonization finally rendered several political projects deficient and so they became transmuted into a nationalistic representation in the colonial period - this will be analyzed in chapter 3.

## **2.1. The development of the discontents of the Neo-Confucian world**

### ***2.1.1. The Limits of intellectual challenge: on Silhak and Silhak-pa***

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1) For an understanding of the political situation of early Chosun, see LEE Geung-Ik (1966).

For scholars in Korean studies, late Chosun had an intellectual undercurrent that was extremely critical of mainstream Neo-Confucian thought and to the reality of the Confucian yangban class. *Silhak* and *the Silhak-Pa*, which have been commonly translated in English as the practical learning, and the practical learning school each, have been the categories that characterized the intellectual flow of late Chosun. In fact, many works on the intellectual history of Chosun have highlighted *Silhak* and *Silhak-Pa* as anti-Neo-Confucianism or post-Neo-Confucianism, while 'the Neo-Confucian disabilities' were blamed for the loss of state sovereignty and the failure of the autonomous realization of modernity. Moreover, *Silhak* and some of the *Silhak* thinkers have been recognized as an important influence and background for the reformative ideas and radical politicians of the late nineteenth century (CHO Min in *Group of Early Modern Korean Society*, 1998; LEE Sang-Ik, 2000). Last but not least, many *Silhak* thinkers are importantly appraised for their strong national identification and their critique of China-centered ideas of the world (JON Ha-Chol, 2001).

There have been a number of debates in Korean Studies on how to conceptualize the meanings of *Silhak* and how to categorize Confucian intellectuals around the *Silhak-Pa* (for example, BAEK Nak-jun, 1975; PARK Jong-hong et al., 1975; KIM Young-Oak, 1995, 1990; Ogawa, 1995). One of the interesting debates on *Silhak* in Korean Studies is related to the scholarly situation in which many contemporary scholars have predominantly understood *Silhak* as the counter-thesis of orthodox Neo-Confucianism. KIM Young-Oak (1990) argues against the common view, however, that *Silhak*, as the alternative intellectual flow to Neo-Confucianism, is the constructive work of contemporary Korean intellectuals under the influence of the colonial experience and a model of modernity

imported from the West.

*Silhak* is not an historical fact. It is an interpretation for linking isolated events in the past, an historical product of an historiography constructed by future commentators in their historical situation. The interpretation is necessarily subordinated to the epochal consciousness that produced it. It is directly related to the structure of modernity as influenced by the unfortunate historical process in the twentieth century... (p. 26) (*Italics added*)

He argues that the vocabularies of major Confucian literati who belonged to the practical learning school - *Silhak-Pa* - and their thoughts, were still under the Confucian paradigm. A serious misunderstanding, therefore, is widely rooted in the common idea that the practical learning school promoted their interests on economic issues and social reforms for the people, while conservative Neo-Confucianists at that time still indulged in metaphysics. According to Kim, the project of rediscovering Confucian intellectuals as members of *Silhak-Pa*, itself discloses the changed nature of the concept, *Silhak*, that becomes something like a 'modern concept of movement' (see, Koselleck, 1985 for embedded new meanings in European history).

In order to clarify the concepts, it is necessary to investigate their literal meaning. Generally speaking, each syllable in written Chinese - under the Roman lettering - has its own meaning, so it is better to treat them as independent words. To begin with, the second word, *hak* (學), could be understood directly as 'learning' in the modest attitude under which intellectuals identify themselves as students of what they study and work on, or as 'study' in general. The third word, *pa* (派), literally means a flow of water, and could be translated as 'school' or 'scholarly group' in which members share a distinctive intellectual element, although their

particular interests and arguments could be differently interpreted. *Sil* (실實), as noun, could be extensively rendered as 'true facts' and 'truth of spirit or value' (BAEK Nak-jun, 1975). The Neo-Confucian paradigm in which self-discipline bred supreme morality could not be separated from the order of the universe, emphasizes *Sil* (실實), while *Heo* (허虛) is problematized as the counter-concept- in fact, the conceptual dichotomy of *Sil* and *Heo* has its root in the major ancient Chinese classics. CHU Hsi (주자朱子), who is commonly understood as one of the founders of Neo-Confucianism, wrote the term, *Silhak*, at the end of his introduction to *the Doctrine of the Mean* (중용장구中庸章句). For him, *Silhak* must have been the valuable and, for that reason, real and true learning.

This book [*the Doctrine of the Mean*] speaks at first of one reason/Reason, which disperses and becomes the middle of all matters, and at last is reunited as one reason/Reason. It fills the universe when manifested from within and is conserved in the secret place when taken inside. Taste is endless, infinite. All are **true and valuable learnings**. (KIM Young-Ok, 1995: 52-56) (own English translation with emphasis added)<sup>2</sup>

However, at least for CHU Hsi, *Silhak* was neither an independent intellectual flow nor a particular disciplinary field in the academic world, nor again a major conceptual tool. The fact that CHU Hsi's commentaries of four ancient classics (사서집주四書集註) were accepted by Chosun's Neo-Confucian literati as the authentic interpretation of those books, means that the term, *Silhak*, was a very familiar one to the literati, not as a

2) '이 책은 처음에 一理를 말하였고, 중간에는 흩어져서 만사가 되고 나중에는 다시 합해져서 一理로 수렴한다. 그것을 풀어놓으면 온 우주에 가득차고, 말아서 수렴을 하면 온밀한 곳에 감추어진다. 그러면서 그 맛이 끝이 없다. 모두 진실한 학문이다. 其書始言一理, 中散爲萬事, 末復合爲一理. 放之則彌六合, 卷之則退藏於密, 基味無窮, 皆實學也.'

distinctive conceptual tool, but as a broad idea of value orientation. In other words, for many Confucian literati following CHU Hsi's doctrines, Neo-Confucianism itself was the umbrella of *Silhak*, rather than Buddhism or Taoism.

It is also true that when economic and social matters in the situation after the war with Qing - but beginning from the eighteenth century - were more considerably the purview of the Confucian literati who worked on state affairs, some began to raise critical views toward Neo-Confucianism and CHU Hsi (주자朱子)'s philosophical system. However, their critical views were in general expressed only indirectly against Neo-Confucianism, as their critique of the actual representative forms of Neo-Confucian doctrine in Chosun society. I will narrowly use the category, the *Silhak-Pa*, in this thesis, for the critical intellectuals who simultaneously expressly distanced themselves from the main stream of Neo-Confucianism in the late Chosun period, and who tried to suggest alternative policy directions, while acknowledging the fact that it is clearly risky and problematic to use the category to separate the intellectual world into the *Silhak-Pa* and the Orthodox Confucian group. The category, the *Silhak-Pa*, so to speak, can be usefully mobilized to indicate the existence of active intellectuals who problematized Neo-Confucianism and its representation in public affairs as well as in individual ethics. Some of them explicitly intended to create a new conceptual space of *Sil* (실實), in order to propound their practical alternatives within the asymmetric relationship between *Sil* (실實) for truth and real values and *Heo* (허虛) for error and unusefulness.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to acknowledge the broad spectrum that existed in critical

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3) See *Hojil* (호질虎叱) in PARK Ji-Won (1977).

intellectual circles. Predominantly, most critics of Neo-Confucianism were engaged with reforming practical agendas towards new policy orientations. They more or less directly criticized the problematic socio-economic status quo of Chosun and indirectly criticized Neo-Confucian state ideology through highlighting the anomaly of the little-China theory under the broad framework of a distinct new state, Qing, for the Chinese world. However, many of them were unable to further develop their criticism outside of the grand framework of Neo-Confucianism. As Kim correctly argues, this is because their critical views were still produced within the confines of the Confucian intellectual paradigm. This meant that they maintained a rather dualistic attitude: strong criticism of the dominant political voice in the state and the incompetence of central bureaucrats in dealing with socio-economic agendas, together with an advocacy of CHU Hsi's ethical stance. In chapter 1, I introduced their ambivalent attitudes, in respect of praise for Qing(淸) 's advanced economic situation and a critical evaluation of its rather degraded ethical condition.

Compared to Japanese intellectual history, the historical development of the critique of Neo-Confucianism in Chosun follows a quite different path. MARUYAMA Masao (1974: 39-40) argues that Japanese thinkers in the Tokugawa period had already begun to distance themselves from Neo-Confucianism since at least the 1660s and began to advocate the return to ancient Chinese classical texts a half century later. Also, Mark SETTON (2001, 1997) compares the critique of Neo-Confucianism by two major thinkers in the Tokugawa period; Japan's ITO Jinsai (1627-1705) and Chosun's CHONG Yag-yong (1762-1836). If I follow Setton's comparative perspective for identifying both the degree of the challenge to the relevancy and orthodoxy of CHU Hsi's *li-ch'i* system itself and the proposal of

alternative philosophical systems to Neo-Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan and Chosun, for the time being I shall accept his indirect view that Japanese intellectuals systematically doubted Neo-Confucianism earlier than their Chosun counterparts.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, however, Maruyama acknowledges that the development of Neo-Confucianism in Japan was distinctive in the Tokugawa period and that it was accelerated under the influence of Chosun's Neo-Confucian thought.

While on the subject of comparisons, it is worth adding that no study of Tokugawa Confucianism can possibly neglect to consider the Neo-Confucianism of Li-dynasty Korea [Chosun], and particularly the scholarship and ideas of Yi Hwang (Toegye) 李滉 (退溪). The tendency to belittle the intellectual history of Korea and to limit scholarly attention chiefly to Japan and China is, I fear, quite apart from all the excuses that one might offer about the availability of materials, a genuine blind spot, and one that I shared by and large with most students of traditional intellectual history in Japan (1974: xxxvi).

Thus, it seems arguable that whereas Neo-Confucianism in Chosun since its

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4) One might criticize me here for failing to introduce philosophical works from the early sixteenth century, Hwadam SEO Gyeong-Deok (서경덕) and his school, for example, but Korean studies has itself barely considered this topic worthy of reevaluation. Rather, it seems fair to say that early critics mainly focused on their own interpretation of *li-ch'i* system, within the context of their participation in the enduring national debate among the Confucian literati. The North Korean historiography of the history of philosophy in Chosun has interpreted the debate on the *li-ch'i* system as a Korean version of the debate on idealism versus materialism (JUNG Sung-Chul, 1988) in the history of European philosophy. I rather doubt the validity of the orthodox Marxian interpretation of the historiography of European philosophy, on the one hand, and the mirroring of the Korean debate to fit its European counterpart, on the other.



contribution to the emergence of Chosun, was deeply rooted in its political and intellectual world and lasted significantly longer, its Japanese counterpart had a relatively short history in terms of its intellectual and political influence, although the introduction of Confucianism in Japan was also protracted. This may also mean that the critical Confucian literati in Chosun had much more difficulty in distancing their philosophical perspectives from the dominant *li-ch'i* system of Neo-Confucianism for intellectual discourse. This also reflects the different position of the Confucian literati in politics and state affairs in Chosun and Tokugawa Japan. Whereas Confucian thinkers in Tokugawa Japan took directions for their advisory roles for the state elite of the warrior class<sup>5</sup>, their counterparts in Chosun developed an overall political culture in which they functioned as state bureaucrats and became actual power holders. In other words, a philosophical knowledge system was deeply implicated in politics in Chosun, with philosophy and politics being inextricably intertwined with one another in determining the literati's political and philosophical orientation. This explains why an alternative philosophical formulation to Neo-Confucian metaphysics appeared in Chosun relatively later than in Tokugawa Japan, in spite their having been a long tradition of 'internal critique' of the *li-ch'i* system.

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5) Eisenstadt (1996a, b) clearly points out the particular nature of Confucian influence in Japanese history, compared to Chinese, Korean (Chosun) and Vietnamese counterparts, even though his view on Confucianism in Chosun wrongly sees it as an aristocratic setting. According to Eisenstadt, Confucianism and Buddhism in Japan neither changed the central state structure nor challenged the structure of the ruling elites. Rather they instrumentally contributed to advance the existing power structure and own cultural characteristics.

CHONG Yag-yong was an exemplary critical Confucian thinker in late Chosun. He has been generally accepted in Korean Studies as a distinctive Confucian thinker who produced his own moral and philosophical paradigm beyond Neo-Confucianism, as well as a wide range of socio-political reformist ideas (Setton, 1997; KIM OakSook Chun, 1994). Interestingly, his major writings - *Kyongse yupyo* in 1817, *Mokmin simseo* in 1818 - are works produced during eighteen years 'in exile', following the political suppression of catholic expansion at the end of the eighteenth century. His double intellectual orientation, suggesting policy-oriented political agendas that at the same time looked to overcome Neo-Confucian philosophy, was a compromise that reintroduced the implications of the administrative structure of an ancient Chinese state, on the one hand, and looked to revitalize ancient Chinese classics against Neo-Confucianism, on the other. Chong emphasized the role of the king for state affairs, rather than criticizing the monarchy system itself. For him, the problems of Chosun were caused by a rigid network of central bureaucrats dominating the state, who politically utilized Neo-Confucian doctrines. However, his politically motivated philosophy did not develop into an alternative political force in Chosun politics in the nineteenth century, largely due to his exiled status: he was a politician and thinker who had already become isolated from the state.<sup>6</sup>

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6) The contextual evaluation of the intellectual direction of some critical Confucian or (semi-) Confucian thinkers in the nineteenth century through the identification of their socio-political backgrounds, is common in Korean Studies. Even though analysis of the knowledge-creating process in individual intellectuals must not be limited to the single investigation of the socio-political and economic situation by which their intellectual range was arguably determined, it does seem plausible to sketch the personal histories

### *2.1.2. The Limits of the People's Collective Movements: On the religious ideas of the new world*

If I accept the conceptual dichotomy between expansions of political influence from above and from below, the contribution of the Confucian yangban class that dominated the state and intellectual world must be classified as the former. The political contribution from below that shook Chosun's Neo-Confucian socio-political system, emerged only in the nineteenth century, when the long-term development of socio-economic transformations that had been taking place since the seventeenth century - after the wars - began to conflict with the state and societal ideology and became manifest in collective protests and uprisings. The impact of the wars was more significant in the economic sphere than in the political and tended to promote a critical attitude from the people towards the rigid social hierarchy. The economic reform of the early Chosun period, in spite of advancing Koryo's economic system, began to run into problems, due to its lack of understanding of ordinary farmers' interests. The increased power of the yangban landowners more and more exploited farmers, with only of the protagonists 'philosophically' challenging Neo-Confucian doctrines and criticizing the Christian ideas of ethics in late Chosun, or at least it provides a clue for understanding the complex of intellectual flows. While CHONG Yag-yong was an exiled thinker, SHIM Dae-Yoon (1806-1872) and CHOI Han-Gi (1803-1877) were also proto-types of the outsider to central politics (HAN Hyung-Jo et al., 2000; KIM Young-Oak, 1990; Lim Hyung-Taek, 1996). This means that intellectual renovations from Confucian literati and the possible emergence of alternative knowledge systems were conceived in isolation from any reformative political programmes of the state political elite.

gradual recognition of their private property rights. Many commoners, including farmers, were engaged by the state for public works, and forced to contribute special local products. The wars enabled commoners to escape these duties, both thanks to a lack of full administrative control, and as consequence of slaves' and commoners' escape from the lands and local community. In its post-war economic policy, the state increased and encouraged land for cultivation and changed the method for gathering taxes, so as to decrease commoners' burdens. For example, the submission of special local products to the state was replaced by rice and cotton. State merchants visited local markets to purchase the local products, and this process helped to develop both government logistics and commercial production. The farmers themselves introduced more productive methods for farming, planting a partly-grown rice rather than directly planting the seed. The subsequent increase in productivity made farmers wealthy and aroused the landowners' interest. Consequently, tenant farmers found themselves with more complicated and exploitative contracts. Economic diversification among the commoner and yangban class, found resonance in the conflictive political voices of the eighteenth and nineteenth century (LEE Ho Chol, 1997).

The economic development of late Chosun, from the middle of the seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth century, has been a 'hot' theme for Korean Studies (RHEE Young Hoon, 1996). Clearly, this is related to the intellectual legacy of Japanese colonialism; this dimension will receive considerable attention in chapter 3. The general assumption of the colonial intellectual world, was that Chosun did not have a proper feudal economic system and thus was unable to internally produce a capitalist economy. Intellectually and politically, this was related to a Marxian paradigm that

applied the five economic stages of history to its understanding of the political and economic nature of Chosun society. With regard to the policy-making process, the claim of an underdeveloped economy and the lack of an autonomous capacity for economic development was utilized by the colonial state in order to justify Japan's colonization of Korea. For Korean economic historians, this assumption and its supporting evidence seem altogether too 'dogmatic'. They have located some points of ambiguity in the theory of capitalism and sought to identify significant economic elements that could be regarded as the embryo of capitalism in Chosun, and which would thus make it comparable with some of its European counterparts. In relation to the economic development of South Korea, the theme is more narrowly shaped by the question of the historical origin of capitalism in Korea. I will discuss these debates, in terms of the development and the change of historiography, in the next chapter.

In the later Chosun period, the yangban class expanded in relation to all other classes. Under the social circumstance in which family backgrounds determined peoples' socio-political positions in society, passing the higher examinations was an initial requirement for promotion in the state, and the title given by the state became a prestigious symbol in ordinary life. The introduction of the sale of titles as a temporary relief measure in 1593 - following the Japanese invasion - and its openness to commoners and slaves at the end of the seventeenth century, became a method through which to obtain a 'paper' career. Wealthy commoners could promote themselves with documents that were perceived as an entry into the yangban network in several ways: marriage with economically down-at-heel yangbans; the enrollment of their sons in local state schools; and the production of a good family record. While local functionaries and

discriminated descendants of yangbans (서얼庶孽) extended their administrative roles locally, yangbans generally withdrew more and more from direct influence in local affairs (Deuchler, 1997). The local functionaries, who had mediate roles between the head of the local office-sent by the state- and the commoners and local yangbans were heavily criticized by CHONG Yag-yong (1817), in that they only sought their own economic interest, and were often targeted by the peoples in collective protests. However, as the intermediate elite group for local affairs, they also suffered from a poor social rank below that of the yangban class. Later, many of them and their descendants would enjoy roles in the colonial state, while others actively participated in independence movements (LEE Hoon Sang, 1994).

The idea of the state in the traditional Korean context has no counter-equivalents in power relations: here, there is no tradition of separating the state for politics from the Church for morality and ethics, as in European history. Politics was always in the moral sphere where practical matters should be interpreted with the means of moral judgments. Such an orientation derived from the Confucian literati's distancing from Buddhism and Taoism and its restoration of ethics for human beings in the making of a moral politics. If Buddhism, Taoism and shamanism had developed their own ethical codes against Confucianism and Confucianism had inaugurated religious rituals at the same time, there would have been a serious conflict between politics and religion. One of the reasons why the Jesuits were persecuted in the nineteenth century, while other religions, up until then, had received a less harsh reception, was because only Christianity contested the rigid Confucian ethics and family rituals which were regarded as an extension of political life. Confucianism and other

religions in Chosun to some extent maintained a balance, in the sense that while Confucianism highlighted the moral discipline, ethics and an overall social relationship, Buddhism and other religions were mainly concerned with cosmology and eternal human life beyond any claim of 'this worldly' values. Of course, this could also be taken to mean that the power of Confucianism in politics excluded other religions from participating in politics. Many Western observers in the nineteenth century were confused by this particular phenomenon in Chosun and often failed to understand peoples' religious life beyond their own conceptualization of religion and politics constructed upon their own societal knowledge (KIM Chong-Suh, 1994).

The ideological frameworks of two major peoples' uprisings in the nineteenth century, the *HONG Kyungnae Rebellion* (1811-1812) and the *Donghak Movement* (동학東學) from 1860, show an indigenous collective political movement based on particular religious ideas beyond Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity. Given the fact that Chosun was a highly-organized society with self-imposed social and ethical duties in the Confucian doctrines, it would not be difficult to extensively understand that the peoples' physical conflict with state armies meant symbolic neglect of the kingship and further, rejection of the political authority of the state. It was *Chunggamnok* - a divinatory text - that was appealed to as political justification of the rebellion against Chosun state authority. The main idea of *Chunggamnok* could be understood as a millenarianism that provocatively interpreted the emergence of Chosun and its possible collapse. In fact, when LEE Sung-Gye took state power at the end of Koryo in the late fourteenth century, his political ambition was supported by millenarian ideas, by then widely rooted in the peoples' view of the state. Interestingly,

millenarianism in traditional Korean thought, as the mixed idea of the end of the world and the genuine opening of a new era had been politically galvanized to evaluate state authority. Accordingly, *Chunggamnok* was considerably manipulated and brought to bear on the problem of the Chosun state in local affairs (Karlsson, 2001). The *Donghak* movement - it literally means Eastern learning -, however, did not orient itself to the rejection of the state and kingship. Rather, its politics requested a wide range of reforms, for the people from the state. However, at the same time, it criticized major religious ideologies - Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity - with its own religious doctrine emphasizing Heaven's way, focusing on the idea of the human being in general, beyond the individuals mapped in the social hierarchy (CHOI Je-Woo, 1999; 1973). *Donghak* quickly came to influence peoples' religious and political consciousness and developed into a political movement, both against local administrators and the yangban class and against international external powers. After defeat by the combined state and Japanese army in 1894/5, its collective political force was dismissed and its leaders looked to instead develop *Donghak* as an institutionalized religion in the colonial period (Memorial Committee of the *Donghak* Revolution, 1995). In other words, the people who could not find proper practical justifications for collective political protest in Confucianism sought ideological foundations from religious world views.

*Donghak* as religion and its political clash with the state, though without denying state authority, have been significant features of Korean Studies for several reasons. First of all, *Donghak* presented an indigenous alternative political response from below at a time of state crisis in the face of an international threat to sovereignty. This is why the modern history of



collective political movements in Korean studies normally begins with the *Donghak* movement, whose characteristics included the nationalistic idea and a claim for reform-oriented political agendas for domestic affairs. When state sovereignty became a hot public issue under the intervention of a foreign imperial power and again when the authoritarian state and democratic movements engaged in confrontation, the *Donghak* movement historically aroused great intellectual interest. Secondly, the political movement was founded with the help of religious doctrines that were themselves created by a new type of cosmological interpretation of the human conditions beyond Confucianism and Buddhism (KIM Sang-Il, 2000). This element has been particularly highlighted in the philosophical interpretation of a genuine Korean thought, or in more moderate tone, the Korean world view, which persisted, despite an influx of foreign thoughts. In particular, there was a rather creative formulation of the relationship between God and human beings and the related substantive question concerning the relationship between heaven and this world, on the one hand, and their own understanding of western thought, Christianity, and eastern thought, *Donghak*, as particular forms of universal teaching for human affairs - merely differentiated due to geographical locations -, on the other hand, that were reintroduced into philosophical discourse (CHOI Je-Woo, 1999; 1973). Accordingly, Confucianism and Buddhism were classified as non-Korean thought, whose influences had already been exhausted. The third element of *Donghak* is its political development, in which many works in Korean studies have shown significant interest, by-and-large interpreting *Donghak* in terms of its never fully realized potentiality in the transformation of Chosun into a modern state. Suppression of the *Donghak* movement in 1894 by the allied army of Chosun and the Japanese state, and then later, the collapse of the Korean

state under colonization, allowed no room for *Donghak's* cosmological and political contribution to the modernity of Korea at the turn of the twentieth century. Rather, *Donghak's* disappearance and replacement by other political and religious programmes paved the way for a significant conceptual rupture between modernity and its pre-modern counterpart, where the indigenous paradigm for modernity began to be treated as a non-modern trajectory.

## 2.2. Conceptualization of rupture

### 2.2.1. *The debate on the epochal origin of modernity in Korea*

In the semantics of the Korean language, which shares the meanings of a number of words, especially nouns, with Chinese and Japanese Kanji, all meanings of modernity in any sense are linguistically interpreted as characteristics of the modern age - 근대성近代性. For this, the location of the epochal idea as the foundation for thinking about modernity, rather unavoidably demands the epochal rupture between modernity and its counter-parts - the ancient 고대古代, the pre-modern 전근대前近代, post-modernity 탈(후)근대성脫(後)近代性, or whatever - in order to concretize meanings.<sup>7</sup> Under the influence of this epochal orientation to modernity in Korean semantics, two events in 1876 and 1897 are essentially contested dates in Korean discourse as to beginning of the modern age. In 1876, ending the policy of seclusion that had caused war between Chosun and a French squadron in 1866, as well as an American

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7) Even though the conceptual difference between modernity and contemporaneity should not be dismissed when different historical transformations within the modern age are discussed, the investigation of the conceptual interplay between them is beyond the purpose of this thesis.

one in 1871, Chosun made a treaty with Japan, opening its three ports for international trade and commencing diplomatic relations for commercial trade with some European countries and the USA from 1882 (Deuchler, 1977). Accordingly, 1876 has been widely regarded in Korean studies as the genuine start of the modern era for Korea. However, for twenty years after 1876, Chosun faced serious economic and political instability. Economically, it was the sharp rise in grain prices caused by an increased export to Japan, and the demise of domestic cotton goods that were undercut by the importation of cheap foreign ones that wreaked havoc. Politically, a divided national reaction to the rapid introduction of western civilization and to Japanese and Chinese interventions in domestic politics, produced both a rebellion from a conservative army demanding improvement of their working conditions in 1882, and a coup by a radical elite group in 1884. Nationally, the uprisings of the farmers' army demanding reformative policies and the punishment of corrupt local administrators in 1894, were suppressed by the allied force of the state and Japanese army. The Sino-Japanese war, precipitated by this event, ended in Japan's victory. The British occupied an island (거문도) in the territory in 1885, Russia then began to intervene in domestic politics, while a leading conservative with Japanese help, killed the queen in 1896. Under this 'emergency', the king tried to overcome political instability by way of symbolically announcing Chosun as an independent empire, the Empire of Great Korea (대한제국大韓帝國) and by introducing a number of reformative policies in 1897. This is regarded as more or less an autonomous response to the arrival of the modern era (Cumings, 1997).

It would be argued that both ways of dating the beginning of the modern era seem meaningful for different reasons. 1876 is monumental for

Chosun's entry into an era of international trade and diplomatic relations beyond China, while 1897 is also significant for the political nature of the state that changed. However, both are one-dimensional. The former fails to factor the meaning of subjective practices in modernity for orienting the expansion of political autonomy, as fundamentally illustrated in the European experiences and the American Revolution. Whereas some economic historians, with acknowledging 1876 as a watershed, argue that it is the development of the capitalist economy hence, with the accumulation of capital in commercial agriculture by the great land-owners, later used to develop major textile enterprises in the colonial period, that was crucial (Eckert, 1991), others still, argue that the economic trend of small farming units in Chosun had its own force for developing economic systems different from the European experience (RHEE Young Hoon, 1996). The former idea faces the criticism that it explains no more than the business history of a few enterprises (SUH Yong-sug, 1992), while the latter idea simply focuses on a sudden entanglement of two different economic systems at the time of economic rupture. The understanding of the beginning of modernity that emphasizes the event of 1897, also highlights the institutional character of modernity, focusing on the change of state structure and the introduction of reformatory policies in the economy and politics. The emphasis on modernization from above since 1897, however, is unable to appreciate the wide-spread willingness of people to engage in the further development of policy agendas. Such an example can be found in the new emperor, who refused to accept both the parliamentary system and the constitutional monarchy. Besides, both events of 1876 and 1897, economically and politically interpreted, are not enough to be reflected in a wide philosophical interpretation, as happened with major political and economic events in Europe and North America. This seems partly due to

the lack of committed involvement from diverse Korean actors, who could be regarded as the driving force of modernity, in these events, despite their remarkable consequences.

### ***2.2.2. Facts, counter-factual claims and the subjective meanings of modernity***

The debate in Korean studies on the historical origin of modernity in the sense of an epochal rupture could have two implications for 'multiple modernities' beyond the European and North American context. These, in turn, are the possible claim of 'imported/implanted modernity', and that of the 'failed project of modernity'. Let us first look at a typical economic historian's argument, that the origin of capitalism in Korea is 'the offspring of the [Japanese] empire' which forced Chosun to open its domestic economy to international trade and propelled economic development later in the colonial period (Eckert, 1991). It would then seem possible to say that the Japanese empire is the subject, or at least, a main subjective actor in Korean modernity, especially if modernity is based on the idea of grand economic transformation, the capitalist way, with a reorganization of society based on the rules for expanding economic activity. A number of debates in economic history in the pre-colonial era and the colonial period directly and indirectly concern Japanese contributions to the Korean economy at that time, in order to evaluate whether they were positive or negative for a specific field, or indeed overall. But how are we to evaluate the effect of enforcement, exploitation, and racial discrimination on the economic nature of modernity? How are we to judge a Japanese empire forcefully transforming the native economy for its own economic interests and its imperialist purpose? How also to weigh the effects of a colonial state that suppressed the workers movements, and even conventionalized the unfair treatment between Korean and Japanese workers? (CHUNG Tae-Heon,

1997; KIM Dong-no, 1998; SHIN Yong Ha, 1997) Any possible answer to the concept of an 'imported/implanted modernity' cannot avoid a subjective interpretation of modernity from a normative perspective. Whether modernity in general has positive or negative meanings in the normative sense, or whether each aspect of modernity - for example, political democracy, a rationalized knowledge system concerning institutional affairs, or a market economy - has separate value-orientations for different thoughts based on experiences and justification would seem to be moot. Modernity appears to possess certain characteristics that allow it to be judged by any subject of modernity. However, the normative evaluation of modernity is hardly objective for every participant. Rather, it must be subjective, in that interpretation of situations and responsive practices would not go beyond actors' judgment with self-imposed values - the implication of Japanese involvement in the economic transformation during the colonial period will be dealt with in chapter 3.

The word 'failed' could have an important meaning in the Korean context. Observing the disappearance of state sovereignty under colonialism, one could say that the Korean project of political modernity failed at that time. 'we ... conclude that Korea failed to modernize' (HONG I-sop, 1963: 16). Above all, it is Koreans' self-recognition of failure that becomes a foundation for a strong national identity. When a project of modernity is said to have failed, there must be many explanations for it. Many highlight the intervention of external powers in domestic politics as the main reason of failure. Incidentally, it was the involvement of foreign powers in a series of political events, and the sovereign power's vulnerability, that produced an overwhelming reaction in the rise of nationalist movements. Whatever the individual actor's political purposes were, they found

justification in a nationalist argument. Lastly, the concept of a failed project of modernity from above, from the elite groups and intellectuals, or from below, from the peoples' organizations, widened its compass to include the failed project of modernity of 'whole members of the political community', finally producing the 'myth' that all Koreans fought against Japanese imperialism, which is wrong in fact (Cumings, 1984)! Unfortunately, the development of the social sciences in Korea has also been affected by intellectual nationalism, an internal and overwhelmingly nationalist sentiment that becomes externally manifest in the public sphere.

Besides, the meaning of 'the failed' seems to be easily garnered from contraposition to its other, 'the successful'. 'The perennial question of why Korea has failed to achieve modernization requires us first of all to seek conditions necessary for modernization rather than the causes that arrested Korean modernization' (HONG I-sop, 1963: 16). A strong military power, an advanced technology and science, a 'developed national economy', so-called western democracy, rather than 'Confucian values', and so forth, have always been illustrated as qualities that Korea did not have at that time. It would not be incorrect to conclude from the historical experience of colonization, the division of the nation and the Korean war, that Korean projects of political modernity had failed to maintain the long lasting sovereignty and political stability, and failed also to keep the (unified) nation-state in the modern age. However, one could produce two types of counter-arguments by means of provocation: firstly, what could be deemed the successes of the project of political modernity, commonly assumed, so to speak, from the late nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century? Were imperialist states that had overseas colonies, really successful examples of modernity? Or those states that had carved Korea into two?

Or those that had survived as independent nation-states?; Secondly, what would Korea have become, if it had not had such a shameful experience? Would it have joined in with imperialist parades, actively participated in the pacific and the second world war, or merely maintained a hermit-like sovereignty? Thus, a dilemma of political modernity for the Korean experience, comes from the tension between the factual evidence, that makes it possible to argue that Korea and the Koreans failed to achieve autonomous political modernity, and the uncertain alternatives of the counter-factual imagination.

### *2.2.3. Modernizing conceptual frameworks*

While the modern rupture in the realm of politics has been basically understood through a few major events relating to state affairs, the intellectual and conceptual ruptures between traditional thought and the modern, have received scant attention in Korean studies. It is only recently that some major concepts have been reevaluated, despite the recognition that some thinkers in the transitional period were engaged in precisely this activity of identifying the intellectual rupture in theorization or certain overlapping elements between traditional views and the newly constituted paradigm. CHOI Han-Gi, for example, has been identified in Korean studies as a distinctive thinker of the first half of the nineteenth century, who tried to produce a grand perspective on cosmological, epistemological and ethical themes, by using creative conceptual tools that were beyond the binary differentiation of 'Eastern thought' and 'Western thought' (CHOI Han-Gi, 1996; HAN Hyung-Jo et al., 2000, KIM Young-Oak, 1990). However, most intellectual accounts highlight political activists who were deeply involved in political events in the second half of the century and many of whose intellectual backgrounds had been shaped under policy issues for



modernization and state sovereignty. By the way, it has been said that Korean translations of major concepts - the economy, politics, art, literature, philosophy, society, religion, individual, nation, for example, all of which are widely used in contemporary Korea - were coined at the end of the nineteenth century when Japanese translations of them into Chinese were introduced in Chosun (see, JANG Suk-Man, 1992 for 'religion'; Park Myung-Kyu, 2001 for 'society'). How did the new concepts contribute to epistemological rupture, in the sense of helping to interpret an emerging new world and suggesting alternatives for the future of Korean politics? The intellectual transition, from the mobilization of traditional vocabularies to new terms for dealing with social, political and ethical matters, accelerated the quest for alternatives based on new world views, for modernization of state affairs, provoking radical intellectuals into political revolts against state authority. A coup by young intellectuals in 1884 (갑신정변), the *Independence Club* movement in 1890s (독립협회운동), the planning of a new coup in 1898-9, all of these occurred on the basis of an affinity with the modern idea of making a strong nation-state, on the one hand, and of the abandonment of traditional political options, on the other. Given the fact that Japan and USA became reference states for many new political intellectuals, who welcomed radical modernization of the Chosun state and society, and given that their intellectual sources were highly dependent on American, European and Japanese intellectual backgrounds- in the Enlightenment tradition, Darwinism and Calvinism - it becomes a truism that the idea of epochal rupture and modernist solutions had already been powerfully absorbed into Korean modernists' political practices by the turn of the twentieth century.

Religious studies - rather than being classified as theology - in Korean

studies have particularly focused on the epistemological rupture by way of investigating the introduction of Catholicism and Protestantism and the concurrent discourses on the separation of State and Religion.<sup>8</sup> One could argue that Korean history has no significant conflict between the state and religious power in the European sense. I have previously mentioned the historical reason for this, which was that religious power outside the realm of politics was unproblematic for state power. In another sense, it may also have been the case that state power remained intact, so long as a religious group could not argue its superior authority over the state.<sup>9</sup> One thing which should be stressed for the historical relationship between the state

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8) The themes of most interest to Korean studies have largely been its religious history since the nineteenth century. These include: firstly, the separation of religion from politics; secondly, the (re)emergence of national religions beyond Buddhism and Confucianism; thirdly, the conceptual relationship between Christianity and (the new) civilization; fourthly, the rearrangement of religions in the contemporary (South) Korean situation. For example, see JANG Sukman (1990); KANG Don-Ku (1992); CHO Hyun-Beom (2001) K'nig(2000) for perspectives on each issue. Additionally, research on primitive religions, the relationship between politics, religion and modernization in South Korea and the reciprocal relationship among religions have become highlighted in Korean studies.

9) The existence of an ancient form of the separation of religion and religious actors from politics and state power is normally mentioned in the historiography of the *three Hans* (삼한) in southern Korea. Regrettably, however, due to the lack of historical sources, this has been rarely highlighted in Korean religious studies. It could be understood as a lost religious tradition, because the head of state in many of the later states became the chief organizers of certain religious ceremonies.

and religions is that there was no autonomous realm for religion in political actors' perception. In other words, when any religious activities were understood as contesting state authority through serious political intervention, major political actors immediately suppressed these. The political tension at the time of the introduction of Buddhism (KIM Suk-Geun, 1998), the linkage between the *Mireuk* Belief (미륵신앙) as radical thought and collective political movement (JUN Gyeong-Ok, 1998) as the clash of politics and religion, were followed by the suppression of Catholicism in the nineteenth century. Until the two final agreements in 1899 and 1901, the Korean state intended to prohibit Catholic activities, whereas French Catholic missionaries and the French state tried to extend Catholicism and its political pressure. The realization of 'the separation of Church and State' for the Korean context, initially meant making the religious realm autonomous from political intervention, rather than a politics freed from religious influence.

One interesting element in the discourse on the separation between State and Religion is the highly focused policy implications of religions for politics around which 'Religion' in general and each religion in particular, were interpreted as a conceptual distancing from politics and the natural world. By comparing political histories with civilizational achievements and through identifying the diverse developments of religions and their characteristics, policy-oriented thinkers could reconsider whether Religion in general was affordable or whether a specific religion was more affordable than others for accomplishing the historical tasks given to East Asia. For this reason, discourse on religion went hand-in-hand with the discourse on civilization (JANG Sukman, 1990, 1992; CHO Hyun-Beom, 2001). At the same time, the differentiation of two realms accelerated many Koreans'

disenchantment with the traditional way of interpreting the world and their enchantment with a new religious life. Flourishing religious activities were not solely limited to Catholicism. Firstly, in the situation under which Western religions were spreading fast and Confucian influences significantly declining, several religions were 'created' (KANG, Don-ku, 1992; KEUM Jang-tae, 1998). Secondly, while some Neo-Confucianists wanted Confucianism to evolve into an institutionalized religion, they were challenged by a Confucian thinker who established a new religious sect within the Confucian framework criticizing Neo-Confucianism (SONG, Young-bae, 2000).

When the extension of religious activities was initially motivated by doubt of the value of politics itself and was oriented toward 'something like religious teachings', in many cases, it was Protestantism that, seeming to go hand-in-glove with 'civilization' and 'modernization', appeared attractive (JANG, Sukman, 1999; CHO Hyun-Beom, 2001). For many Korean political intellectuals and an attentive public in the 1880s and 1890s, the political wish for making Chosun a strong state and the idea of enlightenment for achieving civilization was widespread, with exemplars - often the United States and Japan - providing role models. While many missionaries from America tried to convert through their preaching, it was their medical and educational services and the prosperity of the United States that became highly motivational resources for the Koreans who accepted Protestantism as their new religion. Given that western religions were welcomed by many Koreans as expedient for Korea's political and social necessities, or for their own personal interests in social life, this should be understood as an instrumental and purpose-oriented rationality, rather than a communicative rationality. Such an instrumentalism was later

to block the development of rational communications among competing actors in South Korea. Supplementing their critique of other religions, many Korean believers also came to interpret their own problematic past in the light of the comparison with the puritan way of life. Accordingly, the development of religious thought and related socio-cultural changes, occurred under Western influences that became part of the overall climate for Korean intellectuals and socio-political actors. The religious actors - whom it is impossible to conceptually categorize in Chosun - in the colonial period made every effort to secure the religious realm as an hermeneutically constructed autonomous sphere, sealed from the desperate political situation, in which they could reinterpret the necessity of Korea's independence through religious vocabularies. Later, the religious leaders of major religions organized the political independence movement of 1919 and members of a nationalistic religion became the protagonists of political terrorism against the colonial state (KANG, Don-ku, 1992).

#### **Conclusion: Korea as an inoperative political community**

The gravest and most painful testimony of the modern world, the one that possibly involves all other testimonies to which this epoch must answer (by virtue of some unknown decree or necessity), is *the testimony of the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community* (Nancy, 1991: 1) (*Italic added*).

*The Empire of Great Korea* disappeared in 1910 with the annexation by Japan after five years of protectorate status. The young empire, which had just announced itself as empire in 1897, became a colony, denied the opportunity to enjoy its independent sovereign status in world politics. Around the series of political events of that period, many interesting questions arise: Why did the king of Chosun, Kojong, want to be reborn

as emperor and why did Japan curtail this status in 1907? Why did some Korean modernists in the state want the handover of their sovereign state to Japan that was deeply involved in the assassination of their queen in 1896? Why also did major international powers, who prided themselves on their role as guardians in civilizing peoples, ignore the Korean envoy's plea for international help at the Hague in 1905? Such questions are the staple fodder of historians in Korean Studies, concerning the collapse of Korea and the emergence of the colonial state, as well as being questions that attracted foreign diplomats at that time (see, the institute of German Studies, 1992 for the diplomatic reports of the Austro-Hungarian Empire between 1885 and 1913).

Insofar as Korea was colonized, comparison became inescapable for evaluating the new life. For agents of the colonial state, the comparison between previous national culture and the state, and 'the new epoch in the advanced civilization' had to be emphasized as a countermeasure to peoples' reluctance to embracing the new state (see Tsurumi, 1984 for the difficulties for introducing the public education system). The difference of perception between 'the degradation from the people of the empire in the civilized world to the people colonized in the barbarian state' and 'the civic change from one vulnerable and poor state to another great empire with strength and advanced civilization', proved divisive. This line between sentiments and the bounded political attitudes towards colonial authority, constitute the Koreans' own legacy of the colonial period. In spite of the overwhelming memoirs of many old Koreans that Koreans always resisted Japanese agents and the colonial state in order to protect national sovereignty, in actual fact Korea, as a political community, was never unified in its opposition to the invader. There is no empirical evidence for

the popular saying, 'united we live, scattered we die', being reflected at the national level in order to protect or restore sovereignty, even though Korea has often been argued as the most tough and contentious colony in the extended Japanese world (Myers and Peattie, 1984). How is it possible to explain the fact that when an individual fought against the Japanese armies in Manchu, another pursued him as the secret agent of the colonial police? Why did Koreans fight each other as workers on the one hand and employers, on the other, over the racial discrimination instigated by their Japanese counter-parts? One could argue that it is the problematic nature of the Koreans themselves that ultimately led to their colonization. Did they really deserve to be colonized? It is not difficult to link this type of political rhetoric to a widely observable mode of theoretical inquiry on national identity and the particularities of collective behavior based on a strong idea of the political-cultural community. If the fragmentation of the Korean community is explicated on the basis of the national culture of Korea, then this conjures to a deterministic view of collectivity and its cultural resources in an ultimate sense.

### 3. Living in mastery and the desire to have new visions: modernity and the colonial condition

#### **Introduction: A path to modernization under the colonial experience**

In the previous chapter, I introduced the high scholarly interest in Korean studies in understanding the post-1876 era, before Korea's annexation to Japan, as the period of Koreans' autonomous responses to modernity. In spite of the indisputable theorem in the social sciences that factual evidence should be free from any political manipulation, the research trend for the post-1876 period can be clearly understood as a concrete example of Weber's inescapable dilemma with regard to *the objectivity of the social sciences*. The social scientists' research interests and questioning, through which their research begins to take shape, could not be fully subsumed under the concept of objectivity. I also indicated that one of the underpinning assumptions - or sometimes the loudly proclaimed reason - for this historical research is deeply related to the counter-factual imagination of the colonial experience and of the Japanese involvement in modernization at that time.

It is not too difficult to imagine the intellectual responses at that time, shaped as they were by the political impact of colonialism. Korean and Japanese intellectuals and academics had to embed the meaningful - both negative and positive - differentiation between previous Korean history, its cultural heritage and the state, on the one hand, and the emergence of the Japanese colonial state that introduced modernization policies, on the other, unless they could prefer new alternatives, such as socialism, that castigated both the before and the after. Contemporary Korean studies could never



free itself from its historical legacy. For some social scientists, Korea's colonial experience is regarded as a fruitful source for clues to answering their research questions. At the same time, the issue of colonialism and development in Korea is also linked to Korean economic history or business history, to some extent covering the economic and policy history of the Japanese empire in Japanese studies, and colonial history in Taiwanese studies. There was, for example, a debate between political economists on the contribution of Japanese colonialism to Korean economic development. A critique of Kohli (1994)'s paper entitled, 'Where do high growth political economies come from? The Japanese lineage of Korea's developmental state' (Haggard, Kang and Moon, 1997) and Kohli's reply (1997) can be seen as part of this trend. This debate unfurled amidst a marked academic interest in ways of understanding the Korean economy and the peculiar manner in which the state mobilized resources, and precipitated conjectures as to whether or not this could have policy implications for other developing countries. While some critics problematize Kohli's deterministic view, by introducing counter-factual economic data and historical evidence, it remains an unavoidable fact that Japanese involvement plays a significant role for a historical understanding of the development of the Korean economy, a role that in any case needs to be explained.

Thus, social scientists in Korean studies necessarily face the colonial experience (1910-1945) and its heritage/legacy. The purpose of this chapter is firstly to identify the economic understanding of modernity underpinning research questions relating to the colonial experience, although it will not directly be concerned with the claim of some political economists who argue the existence of certain continuities of what the Japanese colonial

state did, with contemporary Korea. Rather it will focus on the legacy of the colonial experience for Korean social scientists and their overall projects, and on what is often deemed by foreign observers to be the crucial aspects for understanding the Korean economy in general. Modernity, for economists in such debates, generally seems to be identified with the performance-oriented re-organization of society by the authoritative state.

### **3.1. Economic transformation: disputes in the interpretation of the role of the colonial policies**

#### ***3.1.1. On the cadastral survey and the new legislation of landownership***

The debate on the cadastral survey (토지조사사업) and the consequent rearrangement of landownership, is one of the most sophisticated debates on modernization in the colonial period. In 1910, the colonial state began an investigation of landownership in Korea, analyzing geographical information pertaining to agricultural land and ending up in 1918 with new legislation for landownership. The debate among economists, historians and sociologists focuses on the meaning of this survey and its consequences. The investigations stimulated by the debate, however, are invariably fuelled by a value-orientation towards the nation, class-interest, or modernization itself.

The durable intellectual disagreement over this issue was again inflamed by the critique of the statistical datum, recently quoted in the textbook of Korean history for high school students (고등학교용 국사교과서):

The Japanese empire appropriated for the colonial state not only these unregistered lands, but also land for public authorities, agricultural lands and forests, the grassy plains, and the uncultivated land that belonged to local communities. Thus, the illegally wrested land from the cadastral survey comprised about 40% of national land

(2000: 137).

In contradistinction to the nationalist voice prominent in several paragraphs of the textbook and the bias of its suggested statistical data, an economist criticizes and refutes through different statistical data, historians and sociologists who have in general argued for what he calls, 'the exploitation theory' (수탈론) of Japanese colonialism. Further, he concludes that one consequence of the survey was its contribution to capitalist development in colonial Korea, enabling 'modern landownership to begin to take root, with its replacement of the 'pre-modern' relation of receiving' (CHO Seok-Gon, 1997).

This revisionist perspective provoked a serious counter-critique from nationalist circles, as expected. SHIN Yong-Ha (1997) first brings to readers' attention the fact that the revised view is no different from 'the theory of colonial modernization' advocated by Japanese intellectuals and bureaucrats in the colonial period and by Korean collaborators who praised the cadastral survey as the 'generous gift' of the Japanese Emperor. He also refutes the orientation of Cho's case studies, focusing as they do on the result of the cadastral survey and peoples' responses at the local level, by insisting on statistical data at the national level. He thereby argues that although the colonial state took nearly 5.8% of agricultural land, it appropriated nearly 59.1% of the forests, so in total taking 50.4% of national land. Another historian points to Cho's rather neglectful understanding of the complexity of 'colonial modernity' which cannot be disregarded in any economic approach:

They [Cho and his fellows] ... ..deconstruct the issue of the nation, which should be included in the epistemological object, and colonial

exploitation, and ignore the fundamental contradiction within the colony. Because they only recognize the settlement of 'modern' institutions for a country's 'modern' development, the massive exploitation that resulted from this process is outside of their purview. The colonial state is only understood as the 'modern, capitalist' state, and the economic space, which is 'purely' dequalified, only appeared by ignoring the historicity of the colonial society in which the people lived (CHUNG Tae-Heon, 1997).

In a third framework, as an alternative to both 'the exploitation theory' and 'the colonial modernization theory' (식민지근대화론), YOO Jae-Geon (1997) argues, in a broad sense, that modernity should be understood not only through the legislation of private property rights for landlords and the bourgeoisie but also through the production of an hierarchical order in geopolitics, through racism, and class conflicts. He understands the Korean case under colonialism as the consequence of a world economic system, rather than being beholden to a class and a theory of modernization within a nation-state. KIM Dong-Ro (1998) focuses more on the development of a bipolar class division, as the overall consequence of the Japanese project of agricultural reform and new taxation. The introduction of legislation of property rights had the effect of encouraging the social perception of land as a commodity, thus provoking a rapid destruction of the social and cultural meanings embedded in the traditional inheritance system, replacing them instead with economic principles as determinants of the life-world.

### ***3.1.2. On the national capital and nationalistic labour movement***

While the debate on the cadastral survey and on the effect of the juridification of landownership is mainly concerned with economic transformation in the 1910s, the debate on the industrialization of colonial Korea in the 1920s and 1930s, tends to focus instead on the characteristics of the Korean bourgeoisie and labour movements under colonial modernization. The nationalist-oriented views on industrialization and

capitalist class-formation argue strongly for an underdeveloped national capital under a policy of colonial control and of violent state intervention in industrial relations, thanks to which the Korean workers' movements were seriously suppressed.

After the March 1st independence movement [in 1919], the movement towards establishing national capital for economic independence was activated. This trend, however, was visible in the founding of small companies rather than big ones, largely due to restrictive regulations by the Japanese empire. ... [Moreover,] many national enterprises in the 1930s- when colonial policies became more rigidly oriented toward control- disappeared, were absorbed by and merging with Japanese companies, an outcome promoted by means of the skillful suppression of the Japanese empire. ...

Labour movements were mainly provoked by the terrible working conditions that were the hallmark of colonial industrialization. Subsistence pay and unendurable working condition were the focus for industrial disputes. The workers' strikes failed overall, because the police intervened without exception. Strikes took place predominantly in factories managed by the Japanese, so they characteristically displayed an anti-imperial and anti-Japanese political tenor. ... The Japanese empire in the 1930s expanded industrial facilities, exploited mineral resources and mobilized the labour force, in order to produce military supplies necessary for the military invasion of the continent. The result was to further decrease Korean workers' salaries, extend working hours, and to introduce several new business (Textbook II, 2000: 165, 167 each).

The revisionist view, however, is based on different case studies. Eckert (1991) discovers that one of the significant entrepreneurs, KIM Yoon-Su, the owner of Kyungsong textile company (경성방직), actively cooperated with the colonial state in order to promote his own economic interest in expanding his business. Also, PARK Soon-Won (1999a, b) criticizes the nationalist-oriented view in that it is too simplistic in characterizing the diversity of workers' responses to colonial industrialization. While *Onoda* cement factories at Sunghori and at Samchok, contributed considerably to industrial development during the colonial period, they also provided wide opportunities for employment and social mobility for Koreans: 'by the end of the colonial period, a number of Koreans', unlike the common images of

colonial labor as a cheap, abundant, unskilled, and anti-Japanese labor force, 'had established themselves as responsible, independent, and skilled workers and reached the top layer of the labor hierarchy' (PARK Soon-Won, 199a: 188). In fact, the overall achievements of Korean economic actors in the 1930s and 1940s were the consequence of the dual colonial effects that encouraged/enforced participation in war-time economic expansion, thereby providing economic actors with opportunities to gain industrial knowledge, and through the requirement that more and more Koreans participate in industrial activities with their Japanese counterparts, saw a growing number being promoted to management on the shop floor. It is clear that while nationalist historians and sociologists mainly explain a certain level of discrimination toward Korean actors by the colonial state and Japanese actors, thereby tending to emphasize a highly organized colonial economy in which the economic struggles of Korean actors were quashed by the colonial state, the revisionists concern themselves more with what Korean economic actors achieved and learnt in the expansion of the industrial sectors of the colonial economy.

### *3.1.3. The binary codes as the source of different interpretations of economic agendas*

It is impossible to identify the whole gamut of views in Korean studies of economics under the colonial situation, merely from the two positions above.<sup>1</sup> Be that as it may, it still remains possible to grasp the basic

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1) For a summary of the research activities of Korean historians between 1987 and 1989 regarding the colonial period, see YOON Kyung-Ro (1991); for a proposal of a new paradigm for economic history in Korean studies, see AHN, Byung-Jik (1997); for the debate on the implications of Japan's capital export and colonial Korea's industrialization, see KIM Nak-Nyun

intellectual disagreements between many Korean scholars, as well as overseas scholars in Korean studies. Different interpretations compete with each other, utilizing conflicting empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks. This situation could be understood as the consequence of different research directions: 'Whereas research with the conventional perspective took the grand theme of identifying indigenous Korean capital as a whole and utilized the data on companies or on factories for this purpose, recent research intends to investigate one or two cases of Korean capital' (JOO Ik Jong, 1991: 33). Or, like the revisionist critique and its counter-critique, this situation may have been fashioned by both a 'magic (of the exploitation theory) beyond economic common senses' and a 'magic of economics' that ignores the actual colonial historicity (CHUNG Tae-Heon, 1997).

At this point, I will look at KIMURA Mitsuhiro, a Japanese economist, whose research questioning and conclusions would provoke critical reactions from those working under the broad umbrella of exploitation theory (Kimura, 1989, 1993, 1995). Even though it is acknowledged that the contributions of each article should be understood under the parameters of the intellectual discourse in Japanese studies, in which research on colonial Korea occupies an important place for the evaluation of the economic policies of Japanese imperialism<sup>2</sup>, and it should be necessarily reminded

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(1993); for nationalism, socialism and the combination of both in the labour movements, see KIM Kyung-Il (1991); for female workers' conditions and their labour movements, see LEE Hyo-Jae (1976) and CHUNG Chin Sung (1988).

2) His critique of economic imperialism in terms of its insignificant contribution to Japan's domestic economy is a good example. See, Kimura

that his research does not fully and officially represent all Japanese scholars in colonial-Korean studies, his manner of introducing and codifying statistical data and drawing conclusions from them, is in no way subsumable under the critique of economics as magic. He illustrates that, compared to colonial Taiwan, the financial inflow into the colonial account for Korea - the accounts for the colonial central and local government - from the accounts for Japan Proper - the general accounts and the special accounts other than the accounts for the colony - is higher than the outflow from the colonial account (Kimura, 1989). The statistical data from which Kimura produced his moderate analysis seem to be rather differently understood by the advocates of exploitation theory in Korea. 'I came across statistics (총괄수지표) that predominantly suggested that colonial rule contributed to the development of colonial Korea, in that the money inflow into Korea from Japan was 4,322,000,000 yens higher than the money outflow from Korea to Japan' (CHUNG Tae-Heon, 1997). Additionally, Chung argues that it is absurd to compare inflow and outflow of money under territorial separation, and that it is necessary to take account of its different usages - in terms of Korea and Koreans compared with the maintenance cost of colonial rule including salaries and expenses for Japanese bureaucrats and managers.

Kimura's other article (1993), "Standards Of Living In Colonial Korea - Did The Masses Become Worse Off Or Better Off Under Japanese Rule?" seems to be more provocative. He argues that Korean masses' living

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(1995) and Myers and Peattie (1984). Additionally, for a brief introduction to the implications of the Korean experience of colonial development for Japanese studies, see HIDEKI Takijawa (1983) and MIYAZIMA Hiroshi (1993).



standards rose between the early colonial period and 1940, as instantiated in a growing literacy rate, survival rates, and average stature, variables, he argues, that were more directly related to living conditions than other variables, like farm income per household, agricultural real wages, and per capita calorie intake from staple foods, which declined throughout that period. Although, there was no direct criticism of this argument, it is not difficult to find quite opposite and alternative stories through which the historiography of pre-colonial Korean projects and colonial realities are understood. To start with, the educational reforms toward establishing what is called the modern school started in the 1880s (SHIN Yong Ha, 1974) and the national education system had been prepared by the Chosun state (LEE Hye Young, 1996). Besides, registration in primary schools in the early colonial period, was significantly and deliberately rejected by Koreans' strong antagonism to the colonization process, while many students and parents preferred traditional institutions and voluntary organizations by educated Koreans (Tsurumi, 1984). Additionally, an irony arises from his analysis of the trends in stature. According to his collection of data, 'the stature of the Korean masses at least *did not decrease* during the colonial period' (Kimura, 1993: 647) (*italics added*). Even though this argument seems to intend to indirectly refute the critical comment that living conditions during the colonial period became worse, he also accepts that there was a fall in average income and deterioration in diet, the latter perhaps suggestive of a propensity of the Korean masses' to fashion their own solutions for survival.

Although it is necessary to utilize detailed statistical data in order to extend knowledge, I cannot fully accept the revisionist arguments either. This implies neither that exploitation theory and nationalistic views are

more correct, nor that revisionist critics are misguided in their data analysis. It is simply because the conceptual assumptions of many revisionists are not detached from their own normative foundation, and this despite their strong critique of the advocates of exploitation theory for their non-objective attitudes in employing emotionally or politically motivated usages of language that are irrelevant for grasping historical realities. In fact, the normative foundation of the revisionists is not derived from the magic of economics, but comes from the strong idea of an economic modernization that must be qualitatively different from the traditional economic structure, a difference which is *a priori* constructed upon the vocabulary of economics. In other words, underdeveloped legislation of property right in late Chosun is understood in the revisionist account as a dead-lock of the feudal economy. At the same time, an economic project, for them, becomes qualified as factual evidence only when it produces a certain level of economic influence. This must be the reason why they do not accept any emerging economic phenomena and the change of taxation policies in the late 1890s as the pivotal point of rupture. Thus, only the cadastral survey can fulfill their criteria for conceptual rupture, from the traditional feudal economy to a modern capitalist one. The normative foundation for them is the modern economic system itself in general and modern landownership in particular.

MIYAZIMA Hiroshi (1993)'s conceptualization of modern landownership and its adoption, as the basis for interpreting the modern Korean experience, for both him and his revisionist colleagues, displays a dangerous aspect in developing the idea of the modern in economic thoughts.

"1. *the Modern landownership system* (근대적 토지소유제도의 확립) is that which guarantees the logic of the commodity economy controlling modern society to pervade landownership. ... It is necessary to deconstruct the (pre-modern) relationship between political rule and landownership in order to establish the characteristics of modern landownership system. ... 2. This [*land-document system* (지적제도)] intends to construct a nationwide, public map detailing the owners of all land, incorporating statistics, locations and so forth, under the principle of one-land for one-owner established by the modern landownership system. ... 3. *The land-registration system* (토지등기제도) aims to guarantee the secure and rapid facilitation of landownership in the future as well as to establish a modern landownership system does. ... 4. *the Modern land taxation system* (근대적 지세제도) is designed to reflect the modern landownership system. In other words, the land tax under a modern land taxation system is collected in monetary form, under the assumption of the dominance of the commodity economy, as well as the profit-orientation of private landowners." (pp.11-13)

His definition of the modern landownership system and its related features, seems unproblematic at first sight, appearing to coincide with the common understanding of contemporary social scientists. While his conceptualization is firmly based on the Japanese model, which has been developed since at least the Meiji reform, it soon becomes apparent that his overall idea of the modern economic system is taken from the European experience. In other words, it is a logic of interpretation borrowed from the European intellectual tradition, subsequently applied to Japan and further developed by Japanese economists themselves. He himself notes the burgeoning intellectual trend in Japanese studies of recent times, which critically reflects on the theoretical applicability of Western experiences of land reform for East Asia, searching for a similar historical development of small-farm management in the region. In spite of rejecting dependence theory and semi-peripheral development theory, and despite acknowledging the need for reconsideration of the theory of the transition to capitalism from feudalism, his insistence on a strong rupture between the modern economy and its traditional counter-part remains rigid. Perhaps because the Japanese experience of the modern landownership system is one that

fundamentally underlies the current Japanese economic status quo. The embedded values behind the vocabulary of economics is inescapably bound to the full economic history of modern Japan. Miyazima's assumption about the modern, at a conceptual remove from the traditional, is in fact not so easy to undermine, in that the interpretation of the modern itself for the social sciences necessarily requires an identification of concrete historical projects - for him, the modern landownership system - which are qualitatively distinct as reference points. When his conceptualization is extended to cover the Korean situation, however, Miyazima fails to incorporate into his theory the issue of (a) subject(s) who decide(s) to develop the 'modern landownership system'. Even though he could hope to limit his role as an economist to one outside political judgement, it becomes impossible to avoid this issue, which was never significantly dealt with in the Japanese experience. It is not because it was unimportant, but because it was superfluous to Japanese requirements. Insofar as Japan became the subject of narrative for the cadastral survey and the legislation of the 'modern land taxation system' in colonial Korea, rather than Korean actors, Miyazima's perception of the modern deserves contestation in intellectual discourses. For the introduction of the modern landownership system by Japan could be differently understood from both the Japanese and Korean side. From a Japanese perspective, it could possibly represent an extended opportunity, a benevolent gift from an earlier enlightened and more qualified Japan to Korea. From a Korean view, it may represent a lost opportunity for autonomously arriving at a modern economic system; Japan's pillage of the Korean project. Could this not be a basis for the widespread nationalistic sentiments in both intellectual worlds? Furthermore, could it be one of the reasons why many Korean scholars display a preference for investigating Korean projects in the pre-colonial period which

were incomplete at the time of the Japanese occupation?

Regrettably, the nationalist review in general and the exploitation theory in particular do not have a fully differentiated idea of the modern compared with the revisionist view, in spite of their excessive attention to the issue of the subject of colonial modernization. Many scholars do not doubt the values of the categories of 'we/they' and 'Korea/Japan', although critics of exploitation theory and even some Marxists at least note that response from Koreans was fragmented, according to their economic and social interests. The exploitation theory does not doubt the negativeness of what Japan left as a whole, while new and old revisionists in economic history question this and political economists positively evaluate Japanese involvement for colonial Korea. At the same time, whereas some recent research focuses more on the influence of those economic policies - the 'shift from a feudal economy to a capitalist economy' -, a majority of the research takes the Japanese empire's violent occupation of Korea as its starting point, from which the intentions underpinning economic policies are revealed - 'with pistol and surveying instrument'. Some of this latter research dwelt on economic transformation, in terms of the replacement of the agricultural economy by industrialization from the late 1920s, under which perspective Koreans were always regarded as victims of social discrimination. As an example, 'The rate of Koreans' unemployment was more than double that of their Japanese counterparts' (HUH Soo Youl, 1993). However, the economic policies, which should be understood as the long-term effects on society of the colonial management of Korea, were barely evaluated *for* new visions of the post-colonial Korean economy and economic actors. In other words, while most evaluations of economic policies and their consequences have been effected under the strong dichotomy between Korea

and Japan and an unbalanced distribution of economic benefit and loss, the Korean economy and economic actors in most cases were treated as the appendages of their Japanese counterparts. This tends to mean that, whatever normative conclusions are drawn, in many discourses the ultimate responsibility for colonial economic modernization implicitly seems to be located with Japanese actors. Regrettably, in spite of the risk of oversimplification, it is difficult to find a considered review of state-centered economic developmentalism, in terms of the economic vision for post-colonial Korea, and this applies both to exploitation theory and to colonial modernization theory, excepting some socialist and Marxian alternatives.

### **3.2. Divergent socio-economic goals and political visions in colonial Korea**

#### ***3.2.1. Decline of the traditional social hierarchy***

It has been argued above, that some of the major economic discourses on the colonial period are at least indirectly dependent on non-economic value orientations, and that these discourses have inescapably political implications, which means that a political reading of statistical data can often be observed. Also, it was indicated that the ways of interpreting each economic issue by the participants in the debates are implicitly related to the intellectuals' own economic orientations *for* Korea in the present time. Whatever the purposes and consequences of the economic policies by Japan and the colonial state might be, it must be true that they had a big impact on all Koreans' interpretative attitudes to the world and that they provoked Koreans to have stronger self-identities.

It becomes necessary here to investigate the socio-political dimension of the

economic transformation propelled by the colonial state. If the political crisis in the late nineteenth century caused many Koreans to become uncertain of their economic relations, which were deeply rooted in a traditional social status, the Japanese occupation seriously destabilized traditional economic relations through its destruction of the political authority of the Korean state and its undermining of the power of customary agreements for the local community. The introduction of new legislation by the colonial state concerning land taxation, partly ignored the property rights of farmers and the right of cultivation, which had not previously been guaranteed by law, but by social agreement in Chosun society. The resultant loosening of farmers' attachment to particular lands meant that they would move from one land to another when the boom for rice exports to Japan occurred. The measures increased competition between small farmers who had to work as tenant farmers at the same time, and so consequently the power of landowners became stronger in relation to tenant farmers. Some of the big landowners, who had earned huge profits, could mobilize their wealth for investment in different industries, banking, textiles, and so on. However, surviving in the colonial economic structure involved cooperation with the colonial state and Japanese entrepreneurs in several ways (see MIN Kyung Hwan, 1991 and YOON Seok-Beom et al., 1996 for the banking industry; Eckert, 1991 for the textile industry), a fact belabored by nationalist and socialist critics.

As I noted in chapter 2, the hierarchical structure of status, which had lasted throughout Chosun society fluctuated significantly in the late nineteenth century, when the people who suffered social discrimination began to voice their collective demand for institutional reform. Although Chosun and *the empire of Great Korea* ended up with incomplete reforms,

collective behavior - in terms of organizing interest groups, establishing religious organizations and even their own religions, continuously developed in colonial Korea. It is interesting to observe the change in the human rights movements, dedicated to eliminating the strong idea of social status and social discrimination in the new economic situation. The paekchong (백정)'s organization of *Hyongpyongsa* (형평사), which literally means *the Equalization Society*, and its active movement for human rights and economic interests is a good example of the changing orientation of social movements in the transforming period (Shaw, 1991; KIM Joong-Seop, 1999). The paekchong was one of the discriminated under-classes in Chosun society, whose members' occupations included slaughterers and butchers, tanners and leather workers, wicker craftsmen, and occasionally executioners. They initiated *Hyongpyongsa* in 1923, following earlier collective actions, at a time when social discrimination was still germane to their situation and when their monopolization of meat processing was under threat from non-paekchong members - other Koreans and Japanese - actively involved in this industry. While the *Hyongpyong* movement was motivated by the principle of equal human rights with other Koreans - with regard to opportunities for school enrollment and to participating in community events as equals, for example -, the history of members' politico-economic orientations toward practical agendas was quite diverse. And this, not only because of a loosening of the occupational tie between the paekchong and the meat producing industry, but also because of a multiplicity of complex interests derived from different regions, generations, and occupations. Furthermore, many members' involvement in other social movements that were mainly related to the anti-colonial social atmosphere, the introduction of socialist visions in the *Hyongpyong* movement and Japanese intervention in this situation, meant that the organizational



solidarity among members diminished more and more by the 1930s. Diversification of their political, social or economic goals and practical differentiations were not only based on their ontological situation as a pre-defined status group, which had prevailed in Chosun society and which needed re-configuring, but also supported by a novel interpretative framework for the emerging world, in which actors' roles were newly demanded, not only as a *paekchong*, but also as Koreans, workers, intellectuals, entrepreneurs, nationalists, and socialists.

### *3.2.2. Reformulating political alternatives under Western intellectual influences*

Around the breakdown of the Korean state and its disappearance under colonization, many Korean political actors felt an initial urge to identify the causes for the loss of state sovereignty, on the path to seeking ways to overcome colonial rule in an independent Korean state. Research on independence movements in the colonial period as a whole reveals how the political direction of many Korean actors changed. While political movements in the 1910s were mainly shaped by an overarching nationalist idea, in which the Korean nation itself became the quiddity for political reasoning, political practices in the 1920s began to develop diverse political projects for achieving the independence of the Korean state. Specific ideological preferences unveiled political tensions amongst actors within independence movements. During the 1930s when colonial rule established a stable control over the colonized society through economic and cultural transformations, and when Korean society itself operated as a satellite of a Japanese empire that sought military expansion into the East Asian continent, Korean actors in the independence movement became more fragmented, according to their ideological choices.

If the grand conceptual transformation - that interpreted domestic politics through the critical issue of the modernization of the state and new religious activities within a newly shaped awareness of diverse conceptual boundaries - occurred at the turn of the twentieth century, its actual representation in Korean political actors' practices became prominent in the colonial period. Several flows in the cultural, political and social movements of the colonial period could be understood as the different contributions of Korean actors' to the new world; a desire to belong, both for themselves and more importantly, for their nation.

Even though a wide-spread and strong perception of the Korean nation was one of the most significant determinants for Korean actors, it is also clear that such a concept was highly diversely interpreted, although never invoking a return to the traditional Chosun. The republican idea of state constitution, which was the founding ideology for the provisional state at Shanghai in China and the independence movement in 1919 (Kourbanov, 2001), and the socialist visions deeply rooted in one of the major groups in the independence army, did not depend on an affinity to the Chosun state, in spite of the fact that the history of the Korean nation in general and of Chosun in particular, as symbols, were located at the centre of the new political visions. Political thoughts from Europe, America, and the Soviet Union, via Japan in many cases, became embedded in the political alternatives argued for by major political actors, alongside of the effects of internationalization of the independence movements, on the one hand, and the economic transformations and changed political structures of Korea, on the other.

Two of the most important political figures of the independence movement, RHEE Syngman and AHN Chang-Ho, who helped organize the provisional state in the 1910s and 1920s and who later devoted themselves to diplomatic activities, lectures on cultural nationalism, reformative Korean civilization and the US-based independence movements, had carved their political orientations for Korea's independence from the observation of North America's broad civilizational achievements (LEW Young Ick, 2000; AHN Chang-Ho, 1973). Unlike many other political actors who devoted themselves to military independence movements, Rhee and Ahn focused on the role of international powers for gaining Korea's independence and on the education of Koreans for making Koreans a civilized people. They can be understood as an example of the modern intellectual, individuals heavily influenced by modernist ideas in the transformation of state and society towards advanced civilization, and a type of young intellectuals that had been spreading since in the 1890s and 1900s. Their confidence in identifying and promoting the merits of Western civilizational achievements for Korea, including Protestantism, thus, became the basic political orientation for their political activities in the colonial period and determined the substance of practices for the independence movements. JIN Deok-Gyu (1985) has investigated the ideological foundation of right-wing nationalism in the 1920s, in terms of the westernization of interpretative modes, later the foundation for the strong anti-communist political actor of the post-liberation period. Ideological development of right-wing nationalism, faced with the strong challenge from socialism at that time, was dependent on enlightenment thought, for development and modernization in general, for homogenizing the Koreans with the Japanese in societal development and for civilizing Koreans for the independence of Korea in the future.

The introduction of Marxism had two sources: a political source and an academic one. It is a well known fact that the political actors involved in independence movements in Manchu and the Far East, were aware of socialism in the 1910s and even had significant communications with the Russian Red Army in the 1920s. Besides, many members of the independence armies shared socialist and communist ideologies, often becoming important political actors in the post-liberation period. However, the development of Marxian thought among academics was influenced by the circulation of socialist thinkers' works in the imperial university established by Japan in Seoul, and many works by Marxian thinkers, translated in Japanese, were imported from Japan. SHIN Nam-Chol, one of the early Marxian thinkers, for example, learned his philosophical interpretation of Marxism at university, and later extended Marxian methodology into Korean studies (KIM Jae-hyun, 2000, 1999), under the influence of BAEK Nam-Un's teaching, who had himself learned Marxism in Japan in the early 1920s (BANG Gi-Jung, 1992). While their interpretation of colonial Korea and even traditional Chosun, and their suggestion of political alternatives under a Marxian framework, should be interpreted as part of a critical response to a scholarship supported by the colonial state, the ways of distancing themselves from colonial ideology were indelibly shaped by the grand framework of European intellectual projects.

The impact of Western thought on Korean actors is significant in three ways: firstly, critical reflections on the past; secondly, strong ideas of the future, with which the present situation is interpreted; thirdly, critical attitudes to the other, especially the internal other among Koreans. The critical interpretation of the past does not simply mean that the Korean

past was fully negative. It also includes the identification of an internal process of overcoming contradictions and problems which had prevailed. This precisely means that the way of understanding problems as problems and the way of accepting alternatives as alternatives, which are irreducibly based on a new epistemology after conceptual rupture and a cosmological shift, are provided with the help of comparative examples from the West, that also provide new vision. Their situation, then, was understood as a point of departure for an enlightenment vision, which seemed to be supported by the systematic interpretation of the past and a logical expectation of a prosperous future (see Chakrabarty, 2000 on eurocentrism in Indian society). The well-prepared visions for the future, necessarily included practical agendas for the present. As socialists, communists, nationalists, newly civilized Protestant intellectuals, modern entrepreneurs, journalists or 'new women', many Koreans presented their political goals and new social ideas during the colonial period, with their own mapping of the new Korea of the future. However, in the fragmentation of Koreans into several and even opposite orientations, including some taking the Japanese side, they began to be critical of other Korean groups. A strong perception of other Koreans in the political sphere as 'the other', or even more seriously, as 'the enemy', finally led to conflicts between Korean actors in the post-liberation period.

**Conclusion: Making alternatives in learning a new civilizational framework**

The colonial period can be understood as the main stage of an epistemological shift, which had begun in the late nineteenth century. Wherever Korean actors were located in the political spectrum of that time, their practices were shaped by a certain recognition of a new world, in which Korea and China-centered ideas had broken down. More

significantly, their recognition of a new world and their embedding in new worldly processes, necessarily required a critical evaluation of their own cultural and intellectual resources, on the one hand, and of the political failure of the Korean state, on the other. Strong nationalist programmes reemerged in a colonial environment where political practices were necessarily intensified under the influence of political control and socio-economic transformation. It was in this environment that Korean political actors sought to initiate alternative political and economic processes for themselves.

The dichotomy between activists in the independence movements and collaborators with the Japanese empire, which has rigidly structured many political discourses, does not seem to be persuasive for understanding the overall transformation of conceptual frameworks in which political projects and their realizations are mapped. In terms of the categorial distinction of Korean actors, many political and economic actors emerged and disappeared through the colonial period. Needless to say, while some Korean terrorists had no doubt of the value of their patriotic acts for the nation, the Korean secret policemen of the colonial state must have had recourse to justifying their betrayals of the nation in several ways. While the independence armies outside of the Korean peninsula did expect the liberation of Korea and the collapse of the Japanese empire, the Korean officers in the Japanese and Manchurian armies could not have doubted their roles for the greater good of Japanese prosperity. The conventional dichotomy also fails to explain the reasons for the positional change of many Korean leaders in the peninsula, who had actively organized and participated in the moderate reform movements in the cultural sphere and humanities, only to become advocates of Japanese policies later.

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#### 4. One nation and two states in Korean politics: modernity and war

##### **Introduction: The broken dream of building a new nation-state**

The liberation of Korea from colonization was achieved on the 15th of August 1945 when Japan finally surrendered to the allied powers. For both the USA and the USSR, the Korean peninsula had become an international strategic point for security. The security fears in East Asia against further expansion of the socialist bloc, enabled the USA to suggest the division of the Korean peninsula at longitude north 38. For the international powers the Korean people were regarded as the uncivilized who could not afford to build their nation-state.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the international powers, Koreans viewed the defeat of Japanese colonialism as an opportunity to establish their own autonomous state, which had been their foremost desire since the experience of the colonial period. The situation in Korea, however, militated against this, despite the ongoing activity of independence movements in the Korean peninsula, China, Manchu, and other regions and an increasing interest in proposals for the governance of the new state. The problem was one of lack of unity among the fragmented groups when liberation occurred. There were socialists who had an allegiance with the Soviet Union or the Chinese communist party, nationalists siding with America or the Chinese nationalist party, independent center-left nationalists, and collaborators with the Japanese empire. These divided political positions and different orientations shaped post-liberation politics in a conflictive way. However, for all Korean actors, the liberation of Korea truly meant the restoration of the sovereign state, an issue that was neglected issue by the USA, at least.

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1) See the historical note at the end of this chapter.



The emergence of the two-state system after 1948 fundamentally determines the direction of societal development in the South and North. As symbolized enemies, the two states have negatively influenced each other in their opposition. Antagonism between South Korea and North Korea is more than that between two states and their elite groups, even though it is normally manipulated by the states. It also thrives on peoples' different perceptions of the other side, based on experience, political orientation, and a grand historical philosophical bent of the Korean nation, according to which the other side deserves criticism. This chapter will mainly concern itself with post liberation politics, in which political actors began to form a rigid position against their counter-parts, both before and after the initiation of the hostile two-state system in the peninsula.

In order to correctly understand the particular Korean situation - the emergence of two states after colonization -, it is necessary to rethink the meaning of the concepts, the nation-state and modern nation-state, in the Korean context. In chapter 1, I tried to introduce the characteristics of Chosun as a nation-state that was quite distinctive, not only in its administrative structure, but also in its political and intellectual resources. When the institutional difference between Chosun and previous states - the emergence of a strong central state and the disappearance of provincial powers - was introduced, I intended to make Chosun a compatible mirror of the nation-state in recent European history. The unique power relationship between the kingship and the Confucian bureaucrats and literati was introduced in order to illustrate how Chosun's state formation differed from the absolute monarchy system in Europe. I used the term 'the colonial state' to investigate the socio-economic and political transformation that

influenced Korean actors' political orientations, without indicating the existence of the hermeneutical contradiction in conceptualizing 'Korean' political actors without Korean citizenship. While many social scientists do use the term, the nation-state, in order to identify its distinctive characteristics compared to its traditional counterparts and thereby implicitly acknowledge the existence of an epochal rupture between the modern age and pre-modern political systems, I do not intend to treat the institutionalization of the new state in South Korea in this way - i.e., comparing it with Chosun and the colonial state. Such a differential qualifying of the new state does not help to recognize the nature of the state in the long term political process. Rather, the two-state system within which the South Korean state has hewn its path in contradistinction to the North Korean will be the object of inquiry for this chapter. In terms of embedding any meaning for either state as a characteristic modern nation-state, neither of them could be understood thus, so long as their elites argue their supreme and ultimate legitimacy over the other.

#### **4.1. Bi-polarization of politics and political antagonism in the post-liberation period**

##### ***4. 1. 1. The political legacy of the colonial experience in the emergence of the two-state system***

Some works on post-liberation politics have focused on the chronological events and procedural problems related to the issues of the US military occupation of the South and the Soviet Union similarly in the North, their international proposals for a temporary trusteeship of Korea, Koreans' divided responses to them and the election for a constitutional assembly. In addition, the Korean war was seen as an sudden event that came from out

of the blue. However, given the fact that major political actors in the post-liberation period had developed their own political visions and different political agendas for the new nation-state throughout the colonial period, the conventional perspective can hardly explain how the bipolarization of post-liberation politics was accelerated by Korean actors themselves.

Among the uncovered political issues produced by the colonial experience, at least two issues - the independence of Korea and the punishment of pro-Japanese collaborators - were normatively accepted in public discourse by most social and political actors. Political actors considered the independence of Korea as the goal of their resistance to the colonial state and the Japanese empire thereby became the source of the power for political movements and military struggle. Besides, independence was regarded as the only way to open a new era in which all social conflicts, that had occurred in a societal transformation driven by an organized modernization through colonial policies, could be solved. In other words, all political actors anticipated the successful presentation of their wills in the new independent state, which, they expected, would be inaugurated with the defeat of Japan in the second world war. The expectation of an immediate rebuilding of an independent state, however, was shattered by the international agreement on trusteeship for Korea. Nonetheless, political actors were not so easily disencumbered of the issue of the future of the Korean state. It is because the public could only identify themselves with those actors who clearly advocated the immediate building of an independent state. All political groups, in the early stage, expressed strong opposition to trusteeship, which they manifested through jointly organizing a national protest. However, this unity eventually split into two blocs, siding with the different attitudes expressed by the US and the USSR in the Joint

Commission.<sup>2</sup>

Nationalism was widely utilized as a panacea against communist ideology at that time. While its usage had become firmly rooted in political discourse at least since the 1920s, for indicating non-socialist and non-communist groups, the setting for the relational formation of counter-concepts between communism and nationalism in post-liberation politics contributed certainly to the construction of clear ideological orientations for each. However, within the bi-polarized understanding of politics, the verbal expression of 'nationalism' and 'nationalist' itself and the self-labeling as nationalist by some political actors, tended to the enlargement of their political influence. Important political and economic figures who were often considered leaders, preferred the label of nationalism and nationalist to that of communism and communist. Through the colonial period, any nationalist activity in the peninsula was easily uncovered by the colonial state and was directly interfered with by political

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2) Faced with the USSR's insistence that political groups and parties who did not agree with the decision of the Moscow Conference in 1945 would not be allowed to participate in the compromise talk, some communist groups decided to accept the decision, whereas the right-wing bloc continuously rejected the procedural development of trusteeship. In this situation, the US representative insisted that all social and political organizations should be included in the compromise. For communist groups, participation in the Joint Commission was regarded as an assurance of their hegemony. For right-wing blocs, conversely, it meant political defeat. For the US, the exclusion of right wing blocs was not acceptable, because it would have threatened their international security strategy. See SONG Gyon-Ho (1985) and YANG Ho-Min (1993).

suppression. This consequently led nationalist actors to be less radical and to either become reformative cultural and political movements or institutionalized economic actors. In a sense, the maintenance of political and economic leadership itself under colonial control, could be understood as a certain cooperation with the colonial state (JIN Deok-Gyu, 1985). For this reason, many nationalists - even in their own subjective interpretation - were accused as pro-Japanese collaborators by the former independence movement groups. When the issue of the punishment of pro-Japanese collaborators was highlighted in post-liberation politics, the images of pro-Japanese collaborators - who had been portrayed during the colonial period as traitors of the nation - became more amplified.<sup>3</sup> Even though punishment for collaboration acquired normative justification and was widely supported by the people, its concrete practice provoked serious political conflict, affecting the future of Korea in relation to its independence. One year after liberation, former Korean bureaucrats, policemen, even army officers in the colonial state, and many entrepreneurs enjoyed an economic status built around their support by the US military government as anti-communists, and further extending their political power as nationalists. Many became supporters of a politician, RHEE Sung-man, who paved the way for a bi-polar politics of the state between right and

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3) As soon as he had returned to Korea, KIM Gu, the leader of the provisional state of Korea, ordered his followers to assassinate one of the main collaborators, SONG Jin-Woo (see Cumings, 1981). This episode seems to clearly indicate how censorious nationalists in the independence movement abroad were to Koreans who took the Japanese side. Ironically enough, Song was a major member of a new party, Hankook Minju Dang (한국민주당) - as were other influential actors on the Japanese side - which was regarded by the Americans as a group of well-educated democrats. Song was finally killed.

left, and who received political support from the US military government. Through a series of political agendas to which most Korean actors were opposed, the state authority lost its political neutrality and fell into criticism from the left and many former anti-Japanese nationalists.

The division of Korea by external powers, the intention of these powers to practice trusteeship, and a tangible ideological confrontation between the USA and the USSR, goaded domestic Korean actors to look for an amicable bloc in which to secure their socio-political positions. During the political fluctuation caused by trusteeship in 1945, and armed conflicts until 1948, most political actors found themselves on one side or another of a bi-polarity. In addition to the disappearance of intellectual influences from the centre-left and centre-right perspective (BANG Gi-Jung, 1992 for BAEK Nam-Un's case; CHUNG Yoon-Jae, 1999 for AN Chae-hong), the death of two political leaders, YEO Un-Hyung and KIM Gu, could be symbolically regarded as the collapse of political groups who were not supported either by the US military government, or by the new state under RHEE Sung-Man's power.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, their political orientations were both

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4) Most of all, the American military government seriously misread the political tension that had resulted from the colonial experience. Under the guidance of anti-socialist and anti-communist policies from the USA, it initially ignored the political authority of the committee for the preparation of establishing Korea - 조선 건국 준비 위원회 -, which had maintained public order until the American military arrived in the South. The leader, YEO Un-Hyung, was a centre-left nationalist with a Christian background, who was recognized by the colonial state as a moderate intellectual who could take over the state without provoking political chaos. He was assassinated by a supporter of Hankook Minju Dang. Moreover, the military government prohibited nationalists in the provisional

nationalist, even though Yeo could be classified as centre-left, and Kim as radical rightist with terrorist proclivities against Japan. For both leaders and their political supporters, political ideologies and their differences were not the primary issue fueling their political desire. Building a new nation-state that was independent from any international power was the first political goal, for which end they could include all political actors. Yeo's case is an example of how Korean intellectuals, confronted by colonization and the introduction of Christianity and socialism, became reformative Christian nationalists with a loose idea of socialism (PARK Yong-Gyu, 1997), whereas Kim's case shows how some nationalists differentiated their positions from those of communists by expanding the idea of a nation beyond class relations. Even though these nation-centered political actors finally lost political power within post-liberation politics, their political orientations, as inexhaustible intellectual resources, have gained prominence in the formation of a strong nationalism as a third political alternative beyond the rigid state ideology of the South and North. In South Korea especially, where political tension has emerged in the conflict between state and counter-state actors, the nationalist perspective has dominated public sentiment and has been combined with democratic movements against the authoritarian state.

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government of the republic of Korea - who had organized in China - from returning to Korea under their organizational banner. Influential activists and militants, therefore, had to come back as individuals rather than as representatives of a symbolic political organization. The leader, KIM Gu, who had an intense dislike of former Japanese collaborators and who did not want the separation of Korea under any circumstance, was assassinated by an army officer of the new South Korean state.

It is no doubt problematic to generally characterize all members of the new state elite in the South Korean state established in 1948 as anti-communists and anti-socialists; as collaborators with the colonial state. The first president, RHEE Sung-Man, was known above all as a well known activist for Korean independence. In spite of this, it should be remarked that many personnel of the new-born state had gained their professional knowledge in administration, bureaucratic affairs, public security and military affairs through participating in the institutions of the colonial state (Henderson, 1991). Its place in the Japanese planned economy meant that Korea's public administration structures were also well-organized by the office of the governor-general. On the one hand, the bureaucratic structure was expanded considerably: the number of government officials increased from some 10,000 in 1910 to nearly 87,552 in 1937. On the other hand, local administration was also expanded under centrally-administered state control (Eckert et al. 1990: 257-8). Even though their professional contributions to the new state have not been dealt with in depth in Korean studies<sup>5</sup>, at least the political contribution of bureaucrats to the formation of the authoritarian state is visible. Above all, they were hostile to former political activists and militants who opposed the colonial state and Japanese militarism. Given that the colonial state and the Japanese empire since the

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5) One could introduce two reasons for this: firstly, the American style of managing state affairs had become accepted, ever since advisors from the USA had helped establish the new state; secondly, new South Korea hardly had enough time to introduce stable state policies, before the war with North Korea and its post-war effects. However, it does seem important to understand how state institutions have been organized and developed by Koreans, the participants in the colonial state in the post-liberation period, in order to comprehend the periodic mediation between the colonial state and the contemporary South Korean state.



1930s increased its suppression of leftist groups, it is then hardly surprising that ex-collaborators failed to embrace leftist perspective. Furthermore, many leftist groups denigrated the politics of colonial activities and supported the elimination of ex-collaborators, making their political position diametrically opposed. With the mutation of the collaborators' political roles, from rightist groups to the state elite, their anti-leftist violence became more pronounced and flourished under the justification of state activities.

When the South succumbed to political chaos and finally the new state was established in line with American foreign policies, the North went in the opposite direction, favoring the Soviet Union. However, the domestic confrontation between different political actors in the North was not so serious as in the South. Here, socialists and communists did not face powerful political challenges from ex-collaborators and rightist groups, but enjoyed a certain autonomous political responsibility for domestic affairs under the Soviet Union's tutelage instead. However, with the emergence of two separate states and the introduction of the communist management of state and society, many landowners, former civil servants in the colonial state, and Christians turned their backs on the new North Korean regime. With the war of 1950-1953, many of them decided to move to the South, where they became yet another source of anti-communism (KANG In-Chul, 1992; KANG Jeong-Gu, 1992).

#### ***4. 1. 2. The beginning of the legitimization crisis in the South Korean State***

Two Korean states emerged in 1948. The constitutional assembly in South Korea effectively plumped for a two-state system, through its unilateral establishment of the South Korean state. North Korea reacted to this process by establishing its own state in the North. During the divisive

period between 1945 and 1948, the political struggle among actors resulted in the dominance of anti-communists in the South and the establishment of a socialist coalition in the North. Unlike the North Korean path to building a socialist state, the anti-communist state in South Korea faced strong political resistance from several groups. While many works on the liberation period in Korean Studies have highlighted the problematic process of the emerging South Korean state in terms of the settlement of the political sphere based on violence, exclusion and enforcement (KANG Man-Gil, 1985; PARK Se-Gil, 1988; SONG Geon-Ho, 1979) and the problematic nature of the US policies for reintroducing the colonial legacy into new South Korean politics (Cumings, 1981), it seems necessary also to highlight the nature of anti-communist ideas in the South, that were instrumental for the reorganization of right-wing political actors.

The ideological fragmentation of Korean political actors in the colonial period occurred over the question of how Korean independence could best be achieved. The wide political spectrum of nationalist groups included different types of socialist and communist alternatives. In spite of an increased ideological tension among nationalist groups, the basic political clash took place between advocates for the independence of Korea and Korean collaborators in the colonial state, rather than as nationalism as a right-wing perspective versus socialism on the left. The recognition that even many right-wing nationalists in the independence movement were hostile to Korean collaborators with the Japanese, is crucial for understanding that ideological preference was secondary to the question of independence. Accordingly, there were two nationalist groups coded together in the binary code for independence. In fact, the grand category of nationalists together with anti-communists in post-liberation politics, was one

significantly manipulated by former Korean officials of the colonial state, while nationalists with experience of independence movements were rendered impotent when their organizational power collapsed after the failure to prevent the emergence of separate states.

The legitimization crisis of the South Korean state in the 1940s is inescapably related to the problematic treatment of the colonial legacy, especially of the Korean actors who had entertained a hostile relationship to political actors in the independence movements. While the North Korean state proceeded to enact its own economic programmes with the help of the USSR, South Korea was forced to follow the American programmes. However, whereas the socialist programmes, that were introduced under the guidance of a new state elite who had made their political careers in the independence movements, were widely welcomed in North Korea, the capitalist programmes instituted by ex-colonial bureaucrats, provoked strong challenges from political dissidents. For the nationalists with pro-Japanese experience and their supporters, the anti-communist ideology was, as a negative campaign, the only way they could retain political power. Political projects were never presented in their own right, but always in reference to demonized others. Only within this tension with other hostile political actors, could they secure their own political influence. The spread of anti-communism in Korean society since the 1940s was the successful result of the manipulation of this tension. In a sense, increasing the legitimacy of the newly established state on the basis of a strong critique of communism and socialism, would have faced serious challenge if the division of Korea had not occurred. The overriding socialist influence in the North consequently helped to reorganize Korean actors under the banner of nationalism. The groups that benefited most from the ideological battle of

bi-polar politics were the nationalist groups. The second problem of anti-communism as a negative campaign, was that as a result of strong antagonism and political conflict, South Korean society was exposed to a highly organized modernization, that later became appropriated by the authoritarian state. Anti-communism has lasted in Korean society, nourished by an illegitimate state elite - this will be dealt with in the next chapter. The South Korean state, however, began to come to grips with the legitimization crisis during the Korean war.

#### **4.2. The Korean war: The driving force of state formation in the post-liberation period**

##### ***4.2.1. The Korean war as the shadow of post-liberation politics***

It has been said that sociology and social theory have concerned themselves less with war as part of their theoretical work, than with many other socio-political and economic issues, in spite of the fact that modernity as a research object has been considerably shaped by the influence of wars, as has been undermined by those thinkers who have developed their own intellectual alternatives within the experience of war (Wittrock, 2001). Traditional modernization theory, for example, which hardly considers war as within its remit, has indubitably and ironically been involved in the process of societal change related to war (Joas, 1999). While war, as the major form of collective violence, has been one of the predominant political tools for inter-state and international affairs, even applicable to economic transformation (Mann, 1988; Tilly, 1993), the implications of war on the process of state formation, in terms of determining certain political characteristics rather than introducing a change of policies or democratization, have been largely ignored in the social sciences. Whereas it is rather easy to find historical examples of war leading to the collapse

of a state and the building of a new state, war as an instituting tool for a young and unstable state seems to be hardly evidenced. The Korean experience empirically fits the latter case: a state authority in South Korea, which failed to persuade contending counter-state political actors, finally gained its hegemonic power by controlling the political sphere through war. The Korean war, as the military event between 1950 and 1953, was a political medium that genuinely contributed to this political process of state formation and the relationship of the state to Korean society.

The fact that the Korean war occurred only two years after the separation, at least indirectly indicates that the new states had not had enough time to establish stable institutions. What are the contributions of the Korean war to the South Korean state?<sup>6</sup> KIM Young-Myung (1993) argues that the Rhee regime overcame the financial crisis of the new state with the help of American aid for military and economic resources motivated by the occurrence of the Korean war, while at the same time making progress on the road to long-term occupation of the state by eliminating counter-actors from politics. However, I would like to focus on the role of the Korean war for the state formation process itself, in which the South Korean state finally acquired its legitimation, on the one hand, and in which counter-state actors finally lost political power in post-liberation politics, on the other. Put otherwise, the Korean war was the event in the process by which the state and counter-state actors finally arrived at an asymmetrical relationship of influence for their own political visions. The common problem in properly understanding the Korean war, ironically, comes from

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6) GOH Byung-Chul et al. (1992) investigates how deeply the Korean war influenced not only the socialist programmes in North Korea, but also the particular political structure around KIM Il-Sung.

its one-dimensional conceptualization as an international war between independent states.

*- A schematic understanding of the Korean war*

The Korean war was begun on the dawn of 25 June 1950. The North Korean army invaded South Korea along the breadth of 38° parallel with powerful artillery and a number of tanks. It was a sudden attack, without the declaration of war, for the 'Redification' of South Korea by the communist state.<sup>7</sup> The North Korean army, which had superior military power over the South Korean, occupied Seoul after three days of warfare and finally reached the Nagdong river which flows to the southern end of the Korean peninsula in early July. The USA immediately called a meeting of the UN security council on 26 June. The UN accused North Korea of invading South Korea and organized a UN army for the first time in its history, whereby sixteen member states sent their armies to the Korean peninsula in support of South Korea. The US, as the major military force in the UN army, changed the course of the war with the disembarking operation at Incheon, near Seoul, on 15 September in the same year. Seoul was liberated on 28 September from North Korean occupation. The allied armies of South Korea and the UN crossed 38° North latitude on 1

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7) The North Korean story of the Korean war, however, denies the initiation of the war by North Korea and asserts that they crossed the border in a 'counter-attack' of the South Korean army, after having successfully repulsed their initial attack. But, as far as the majority of archival and empirical research in the fields of politics, international relations and military history are concerned, the culpability for the Korean war rests squarely with the North Korean side. In this thesis, I follow the assertion of North Korea's initiation of the war as outlined by the main stream of research in the social sciences.

October, entering the northern zone. They were forced to retreat south, however, by the intervention of the peoples' army of China in the front at the Northern end of the Korean peninsula. Seoul was re-occupied by the North Korean army on 4 January 1951. Since the early summer of 1951, the war witnessed no further significant territorial movement and settled near the current de-militarized zone, which is a slightly modified line from the 38° parallel. The Soviet Union proposed armistice talks in the UN. After a further two years' combat, finally, the US, as the representative of the UN armies, and North Korea and China, together signed the treaty for armistice on 27 July 1953. The Korean war produced enormous damage for Koreans and other participants, as well as a high number of casualties: 990,000 South Korean soldiers, 40,000 US soldiers and 30,000 other UN soldiers, 510,000 North Korean soldiers and 500,000 Chinese soldiers were dead and several hundred thousand soldiers were injured (HAN Young-U, 1998 (vol. 3)). The treaty for armistice in 1953 is still in operation today, even after 'the cold war' has ended in Europe.

#### ***4.2.1. Conceptualization of rupture in time: The subjective position interpreting the event***

The debate on the historical origin of modernity in the Korean context was introduced in chapter 2. I argued there that, in spite of a significant rupture, to some extent, from durable institutional customs, none of the novel forms is sufficient to be regarded as the event from which modernity - as the new epoch - began in Korea. Further, I asserted that as soon as an event was singled out, the emphasis of its essential elements for modernity tended to overshadow or ignore other essential elements of other events. When the debate concerns the dilemma of the historical adaptability of a concept under empirical scrutiny, then the notion of the time-scale,

from beginning to the end, becomes a basic requirement for evaluating an event.

*- The illusion of beginning*

The short summary of the Korean war above neglects some important aspects, as it is based on the premise that 25 June 1950 is the day that the Korean war began. The political process, which was illustrated previously, revealed that South Korea was already engaged in a sort of civil war, since at least 1948. As soon as one fixes the period of the Korean war as beginning on 25 June 1950 and ending on 27 July 1953 and insofar as one searches for its independent meaning, then politics in the post-liberation period in general and the civil war between the South Korean state and the extreme-right groups, on the one hand, and other nationalist, center-left and communist groups, on the other, lose their significance as factors of war.

The problem of how to cut and measure the time-scale of the Korean war should not be treated lightly. The periodization of an event is not a purely objective method with an indisputable factual claim. Periodization itself is irreducibly a way of reflecting the event: why did it happen? Who was responsible for it? What consequences followed? While acknowledging several limitations in the defining of the event, one could still argue that the Korean war happened on 25 June 1950: there was a different legal status between the state army and the guerilla force; the scale of warfare lead to more serious consequences and required different political measures; Foreign armies were involved; there was a change of major political actors and their political methods, and so forth. Needless to say that the three years of warfare exhibited distinctive characteristics crucial for an overall



understanding of the Korean war. Is it not also necessary, though, to identify the political conflicts regarding the building of a new nation-state and the political processes in South Korea, even if only to interpret the distinctiveness of the time when war broke out in 1950? Ignoring post-liberation politics or an unbalanced interest in highlighting the three years of warfare, restricts the understanding of political modernity in the Korean context.

If the particular implications of the Korean war for Korean politics are investigated, the war's contribution to state formation should be paramount. As illustrated in the previous part of this chapter, the emergence of two republican states was neither the peaceful product of a consensual agreement between several political actors, nor the simple consequence of strong enforcement by a few exclusive political groups having gained hegemony. Several political actors who had grown with different ways of responding to colonial politics, were unable to produce an unified view on a number of political agendas for the new Korea. More seriously, the American preference of anti-communist politicians in southern Korea and the Soviet counter-response of giving preference to communist groups in northern Korea, caused many nationalists and center-left socialists to be fragmented through divisive political campaigns. During the process of state-building, antagonistic attitudes towards other political actors intensified and further produced physical conflict. To sum up, the South Korean state was not the representative of the conglomeration of political actors in the post-liberation scene: it was simultaneously a defensive and offensive apparatus for a few political anti-communist groups. At warfare in June 1950, the South Korean state (and also its northern counterpart) - which was just two years old and seriously contested - extended its political

powers by means of a violent closure of anti-state sentiment, on the one hand, and with the imposition of military service, on the other. Anti-state actors finally lost political power when the civil war extended into an extensive warfare with several states involved. It is arguable that political groups who were involved in the state ultimately received benefits from the acceleration of the war in terms of the legitimation of state violence. The interpretative shift, from conflicts between political actors, to those between the state and anti-state groups, which had been intended by the actors who occupied the state, was finally accomplished through the military conflict between the two states.

Insofar as the Korean war is understood as a war among sovereign states - two Korean states and their political neighbors - or merely as a symbolic event representing a serious hostility between South and North, then the reflexive attitude towards the beginning of the Korean war would become marginalized. This would also be the case for any research that neglected the implications of the war for domestic politics in South Korea by concentrating on its inter-state characteristics. If the researcher wants to understand the political process through which conflicts between political actors resulted from the emergence of the authoritarian state in South Korea, the inquiry concerning the beginning of the Korean war, or, extensively, on the origins of the Korean war, is inescapable: how did the Korean war, as a symbolically constructed event occurring on 25 June 1950, impact upon power relations among political actors.<sup>8</sup>

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8) The confusion as to the beginning of the Korean war remains even when its inter-state characteristics are the sole object. If previous military conflagrations between the two Korean states in 1949 and 1950, over borders and terrain, are introduced into the discourse on the Korean war, it

*- The illusion of ending*

If what is called the Korean war is understood as another political phase for post-liberation politics in general, and for state formation processes in particular, in which counter-state political actors in South Korea lost their independent political voices due to a remarkably extended warfare which enforces a conceptual reformulation of *current* politics, then the end of the war should also be reflected in the possible reconstruction of the historiography of the Korean war. While one could argue that the war is over, based on the observation that there have been no significant military conflicts since 1953, the necessity for considering the whole picture of the Korean war, militates against its ending with the cessation of military conflict in 27 July 1953. Though practically persuasive, there are at least two conceptual problems with such a view. Firstly, the South Korean state did not sign the armistice treaty at that time.<sup>9</sup> The Rhee regime in the

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would provoke further disagreement as to the day the war began (Cumings, 1997; 1990).

9) For the purposes of the armistice treaty, the counterpart of the commander-in-chief of the North Korean army and the commander-in-chief of the Chinese army, was the commander-in-chief of the UN army, a role assumed by the US. This procedural issue became a hot item for military communication between the related states and provided the North Korean state with a tactical opportunity for excluding the South Korean state from the compromise talks after the armistice had been signed. The right of operation command for the South Korean army had been subordinated to the USA since 8 July 1950 when the Rhee regime abandoned its autonomous control of the South Korean army at the onset of the war. This military devolvement lasted until 1 December 1994, when the South Korean army reassumed the responsibility for ordinary military operations.

South did not want the end of the war, but hoped for its continuance until the unification of Korea had been accomplished. The bellicose manner of the Rhee regime lasted until its collapse in 1960. Even though later regimes abandoned the policy of belligerent military parades, they nevertheless continued to prepare for the expected reoccurrence of war - in the strict sense, the continuation of the Korean war -, backed by the assumed promise of American military support. Thus, the treaty drawn-up for the cease-fire does not guarantee peace in the Korean peninsula, in which, since 1953, the two Korean states and the US have maintained a semi-war situation. Secondly, there is a reluctance amongst major players, for whom the war served to legitimate the separate states, to acknowledge that the situation has changed for peace. Above all, the political voices that argue that the Korean war occurred on 25 June 1950 still maintain an aggressive attitude for a sort of 'revenge'. The North Korean state also does not willingly reduce its hostility to the US and the South Korean state, retaining its ultimate justification in the idea of the peoples' liberation from imperialism. Thus, not only in the contract-based understanding, but also in the subjective interpretation of the political actors in the state, the Korean war remains an on-going process.

The general periodization of the Korean war - the background of the War (1945-1950), warfare (1950-1953), and the consequence of the War (1953-) - which is widely accepted in Korean studies, could not properly address the asymmetric relationship between the event - modified in the conceptual reconstruction - and the situational resources and consequences. Insofar as the time-scale of the Korean war is fixed from 25 June 1950 to 27 July

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See the appendix in GOH Byung-Chul et al. (1992) and ROH Jung-Seon (1996) for more detail of this process.

1953, the fundamental reasons for the war, on the one hand, and the maintenance of strong military tensions between the South and the North, on the other, are not identifiable. Even though reasons for the breakout of war could be investigated in terms of its background, new research knowledge is prevented from going beyond the end of warfare. At best, it may furnish an excuse for North Korea, which, as initiator of the war, must be liable to moral criticism. In order to better understand post-liberation politics and to identify the complications of political direction in a Korea divided since 1946, which has its roots in the development of the two states, it may be necessary to extend the historical time-scale of the Korean war from 1945 to today.

However, the historical extension of the Korean war is not without difficulty either, as it generates a different set of conceptual problems. From the various political processes since the end of the second world war, the identification of the decisive point in time for the conceptual rupture from which war can be said to have been generated, is difficult to pinpoint. Not only is there a continuously accumulating process, but there are also changing political issues and actors who come and go. Under the general understanding of the Korean war, these changes, shifts and disappearances are barely considered. If there were a theoretical implication of the Korean war for social theory, it would be the recognition of the ambivalence between the interpretive certainty and the uneasiness in finding a relevant heading for the series of events. This may suggest, in reverse, that the ease of naming the event is necessarily followed by a de-contextualized interpretation in which the major characteristics of the event are ignored.

*- Date and memory*

The common way of memorizing historical events in the Korean style - more accurately South Korean style - is to name the event with the date. The Korean war is generally known as the 6.25 War or 6.25 catastrophe, in the sense that the event occurred on 25 June 1950. This becomes abbreviated, in many situations to the simple '6.25'.<sup>10</sup> In this manner, what has been argued as the problem of periodization of the Korean war is more seriously exposed. For it implicitly or explicitly produces a strong impression of the 'abrupt or unexpected' occurrence of the war. One could argue that it is more appropriate to indicate the serious psychological shock from the war situation for ordinary peoples who had no deep interests in politics. In fact, the three digits, 6.25, instantly evoke the dreadful imagery of warfare. However, initially, it still enforces peoples' distance from the experience of what happened in the emergence of the state and its subsequent political violence. Secondly, the conceptually induced situational rupture around 6.25, constructs different political qualifications in the separation of two political phases. One of the observable problems in the conceptually driven separation, is that it superimposes value-judgements based on the post-6.25 viewpoint, on the pre-6.25 situation. This becomes serious, especially, when the evaluation of the war has already been embedded in the mode of naming 6.25. Thus, in the history of modern Korean politics, the evaluation of post-liberation politics has been heavily

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10) It is pronounced as "six two five" in Korean. Like 6.25, some major political events follow this convention: the day of nation-wide protest against the Rhee regime on 19 April 1960 is simply 4.19; the military coup on 16 May 1961, 5.16; the democratic protest in the Kwangju area in May 1980, 5.18(the first day of uprising); the statement after the meeting of the two leaders of South and North Korea on 15 June 2000, the 6.15 statement.

influenced by state ideology that manipulates the meaning of warfare between 1950 and 1953 to the maximum level. Ironically, this mutes and creates indifference to the problems of the state elite in the first republic and American foreign policy in South Korea.

#### *4.2.2. A state that becomes the moral subject of war*

The Korean war, whatever it specifically indicates - three years' warfare or a broad name for a series of political conflicts since 1945 or since 1948 -, on reflection, has provoked such significant and serious consequences as to determine the direction of the political development of modernity in Korea: the rise and fall of political actors; the emergence of political dictatorship; long-term maintenance of ideological hostility, and, most of all, the development of the two-state system. Concerning a number of discourses on the Korean war, the states deeply involved in the event have been introduced as subjects of responsibility. While there are several connotations for the concept of responsibility, it normally refers to blameworthiness, which is deeply linked to the recognition of consequences rather than linked to the decision process at the time of engagement. In fact, the concept of responsibility, in many European and American discourses, had been largely devoted to identifying the source of responsibility for the actions of individuals who are supposed to belong to a moral community (Smiley: 1992). The Holocaust, though, and contemporary catastrophes since, have changed the direction of moral discourse, now becoming more anxious toward the mobilization of moral justification in actions that have potentially devastating consequences.

The conceptual problems of moral discourse on the Korean war include: firstly, that it ignores human rights, while it is commonly accepted as the

conflict between several political communities or states, the symbolic representatives of communities; secondly, the Korean war is not closed, an event merely accessible for its utility in preventing the occurrence of similar events and similar repetitions by different actors. In as much as it is assumed that there is more than one community in the Korean war, it becomes very difficult to develop universal moral codes for evaluating the activities committed by the participants. Unlike the discourse on human rights, the Korean war has mainly been a source for discourse on state and policy agendas undermined by the states' power relations. At the same time, given the fact that none of the states accept the Korean war as a closed event, they are not free from possible criticism for their overall evaluation of the event. One could understand this situation in reverse: given that they are well aware of their moral culpability, none of the states could accept closure until the hostile counter-part becomes unable to continue criticism. In other words, the states have become subjects of responsibility according to their own political interest.

For example, insofar as the claim for North Korea's initiation of warfare on 25 June 1950 is highlighted, the North Korean state has faced the criticism that it should admit its mistake as one which precipitated military conflict. Though it may be expected to mobilize justificatory statements for military activities, the enormous casualties of war, including countless civilians and soldiers, should be reflected in its responsibility. This judgement comes from the counter-factual hypothesis; if North Korea had not invaded South Korea on 25 June 1950, the Korean war would not have occurred. If post-liberation politics is seriously considered, however, for a more accurate understanding of the Korean war, the angles of moral criticism would be extended. The irreducible responsibility of dividing



Korea into the South and North must devolve on the US and the Soviet Union, the two subjects in the division of Korea. The claim that, if they had not divided Korea, there would have been no war, is also possible, as the subjects of military violence, two Korean states, would not have come into existence. The 'moral' question of how to judge the US role in post-liberation politics in South Korea should be considered as an issue of the state as moral subject. Is it a relevant justification for the US, in an imaginative situation, that in any case it did not start the War? Even though it must not be criticized as the initiator of the Korean war, its problematic role in constructing the political theatre in which war occurred, cannot be excused.

If the United States had not occupied the south of Korea, there would have been no war on the peninsula in 1950, the United States would not have had such a good case for rearming against both the Soviet Union and China, ... The division of the Korean peninsula led to the Korean War; without that division, there would have not been a north to invade a south. And the Korean War had consequences beyond Korea itself. ... it intensified the Cold War (Hawthorn, 1991: 28, 88).<sup>11</sup>

The moral critique of the subjects of war, seems to measure, relatively, whose moral position is higher than others. While the South Korean state and the US lay moral blame at North Korea's door, it is questionable whether they are morally qualified to do so. On the opposite side, of course, it is also doubtful whether the North Korean military initiative could be justified, even under the condition that the division of Korea and the problematic emergence of the South Korean state are prima-facie evidence of blameworthiness. The relativistic idea of comparative moral

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11) Hawthorn sees that many historians of US policy in Korea in the post-liberation period have these counter-factual premises as the ground for their research.

standards, ironically, relies on two problematic assumptions: firstly, if the other subject deserves blame in any way, then one's own mistakes might be excusable, in that the other subject would be unable to take the moral high ground in apportioning blame under the condition of guilt. Secondly, and connectedly, the degree of blame becomes the measure of innocence: moral innocence would thereby be a by-product of the other's greater reprehensibility.

Since I have investigated the positions of the states through the identification of their relativistic justifications, it remains now to unravel the political course of the US. While the South Korean state succeeded in dominating domestic politics throughout the duration of the War, the US avoided wide criticism of its chaotic post-world-war-two planning for Korea. The latter enabled the US to acquire a stable military base in North-East Asia, as part of its policy to curtail the expansion of socialism in the region. Insofar as the US cannot be classified as a victim of post-liberation politics and the War in Korea, there seems no basis for the US to bring moral accusations against North Korea. How, though, is it possible that North Korea should charge both the US and South Korea and at the same time be charged by South Korea of moral responsibility? Needless to say, it depends on how one understands post-liberation politics and previous military conflicts over the border. If all three committed serious mistakes in different spheres, the moral positions of all three actors must be ambivalent in that they are open to criticism from the others, and at the same time, are capable of directing criticism towards the others. None of them could be both judge and jury, because of their own crimes. If the South Korean army's occupation of some areas in North Korea in 1949 is historically true, as an example of the ambivalent position of South Korea, and if it

provided motivation for North Korea's extensive military operation, it should also be treated critically. The antagonistic attitude to the other, since the treaty for armistice, has been sustained by the moral tension.

This does not mean, however, that all 'the three players' are so innocent as to have only defended themselves. If each could successfully defend its moral position, this does not indicate the absence of mistakes or fault, but problematic others whose roles are not innocent enough to escape criticism. It is clear that the moral defence is possible only 'within' the relationship of the three states. Without the others' problems, none of the actors in the War could avoid explaining their own mistakes and culpability. They simply depend on a state-centered idea of morality. Thus, it is necessary to question whether or not the state is the relevant category for moral evaluation, in addition to the historical evaluation of what the three states did. If the state is understood as the major political apparatus for political actors, rather than the independent subject of politics, it is clear that the symbolized character of the state as representative of the political community, must be deconstructed for the moral interpretation.

There would be two exceptional conditions in which the state should be regarded as the moral unit *per se*: firstly, when the state is recognized as the political actor by other political actors; secondly, when the state is firmly based on the consensus of the political community. An historical example of the first condition is the US case in Korean politics. For all Korean actors, the US military state in South Korea until 1948, and the US since the declaration of the Korean state in 1948, was the most powerful political actor. While the US indulged the diversity of the political spectrum, identifying and treating Korean actors differently, Korean

actors were unable to identify the existence of diverse political groups in the US. This does not mean that there were no internal disputes among US officials. Rather, it indicates that US citizens in Korea would not have been able to make any political voice, without the uniform of the US army and the status of US officials. Thus, the US can be considered as a unitary political actor in this context. In many cases of international politics prosecuted for a national issue, each foreign power could be accepted as a unit, or political actor. If the political direction of the state is welcomed and supported by the people, the state could be eligible as the unit of the political community. However, this second condition is rather idealistic, and rarely found in history. It tends, rather, to be subjectively constructed by the major political groups and through peoples' desire to make a self-satisfied memory of events- the Korean experience of colonialism proves how the myth of all Koreans' antagonism to the Japanese colonial state has been devoted to the formation of a national Identity. This is frequently discovered in many other international cases, where emphasis and omission in interpreting national history are 'intentionally' constructed by the subjects of the narrative. Who, then, could claim to be a victim of the events? In post-liberation politics, the civil war and three years' warfare, the victims are the peoples who were killed, injured, lost families, and who are still suffering from the series of events. The individuals who occupy the dual positions of victims and killers should be excluded from making voice. The soldiers especially cannot be moral subjects, accusing other people, insofar as they know their part in war, though they may be legal subjects for compensation.

The distance between ethics and law should be acknowledged here. These spheres are not synonymous for at least two reasons: firstly, law is

implicitly and explicitly not only defensive, against accusation, but also aggressive, for accusing others. Any judgement in the legal system necessarily requires the premise that the legal system 'correctly' reflects moral values. Secondly, although law is generally understood as a part of the moral world, 'law as supplement of morality' (Apel, 2000b), this should be taken as referring to the legal system as entrance-point to moral evaluation, rather than its end. The trial process is meaningful, not as the arrival at moral discourse, but as its acceleration. Moral space includes something that is beyond what is resolvable through the compensation and punishment of the legal system.

Jacques DERRIDA's approach to interpreting 'responsibility' enables us to notice that there are several spheres for dealing with it: responsibility within the religious framework (1995b); responsibility in the individual's decision process (1995a); responsibility for the emerging political agendas (1992). While the Christian idea of responsibility is evaluated in terms of its a priori foundation, which imposes religious judgement on particular contexts, responsibility in the individual's decision process, for Derrida, unveils the complications of responding to others who are already expecting a response in a certain way. For Derrida, the emerging situation for European integration necessarily requires responding, but in a new way based on a critical interpretation of previous European history.

The way of dealing with responsibility for the Korean war has nothing to do with the philosophical spheres in which Derrida extends the meaning of responsibility. Above all, the event, the Korean war, is not one anticipated for the future or one beginning to emerge in the present time. It is, as event, one that has already occurred in the past, and which proceeds to the

present. The time to decide to respond to it or not, before the occurrence of the event, has already passed. If I paraphrase with respect to the Kosovo conflict, a recent event, it would be thus:

The air raid from the NATO had finished. The peace-keeping forces arrived in Kosovo to protect the Kosovo Albanians from possible clashes and to maintain public order. Finally, Kosovo Albanians who had escaped to Albania and other regions returned to their towns. They began to more seriously realize the whole situation: their destroyed houses, the lack of food and the death of some relatives, friends, neighbors and family members.

Which side is responsible for what happened in Kosovo? The Serbian side, the NATO or Albanians in Kosovo themselves? Who could charge whom with not only the crime against humanity, but also with the destruction of all living conditions? The way of understanding the Korean war in order to 'charge' responsibility for it, is similar to the attitude that looks for subjects that produced the disaster in Kosovo. Thus, responsibility for the Korean war means neither the self-imposed right or duty to make voice to the event, nor the accessibility of the event on the reactionary level. Rather it necessitates admitting and acknowledging mistakes and problems, after the investigation of causes and consequences, which require apologies for the victims. When an event happened and produced victims, they and only they, can ultimately decide whether or not the apology from the offender is acceptable and whether the act of the perpetrator can be forgiven.<sup>12</sup>

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12) This needs clarification: some offenders occasionally acknowledge their own mistakes before the victims' critical claim becomes recognized in the public domain. With the passing of time, it could be accepted by the majority of the political community and could be developed as an indisputable argument for a moral evaluation of self-critique. Within this situation, offenders in the past could voluntarily apologize to victims for the consequences of their mistakes, in order to

While the debate on the NATO's involvement in the Kosovo crisis was fuelled by its disregard of international law, the Korean war by no means suffered from an illegal intervention by the UN. Rather its fundamental characteristic as a civil war is dimmed by an interpretation from the juridical angle. The two-state system in Korea had not taken firm root, but was in the process of being formed since 1948. The declaration of the state in the South, guided by the UN, could be understood as South Korea's entrance into the order of international law. The conflict in Korea that led to war, however, originated in the dispute as to whether the South could join the international law system as a sovereign state. The question I hope to raise is whether or not international law could be practiced with regard to a state when participation in that system is doubted by many of the peoples of that state.

**Conclusion: A contribution of post-liberation politics to the political tradition of 'strong state versus insubordinate political movement'**

As many scholars in Korean studies argue, Korea, in terms of political history, has had a strong state tradition (Koo, 1999, 1993; CHOI Jang-jip,                      be reconciled with them. This situation seems to indirectly suggest that offenders could be subject to approbation later. However, if the victims are not inclined to accept their proposal and apology in any way, they should not be regarded reprehensibly. This would be a regrettable and shameful situation, for both offenders in the past and their victims, deriving from the prematurity of reconcilability. It may mean that the victims are still suffering emotionally from the event. In such a case, both offenders and the people who feel guilty about the event, should wait for the victim to recover, for his/her attitude to change. There seems to be no other way.

1993, 1991). State authority was regarded as an uncontested dignity in the traditional kingdom states. In the colonial period, the Japanese Empire protected state authority with police and military force, leading to a violent and authoritarian image for the state. Incidentally, an anti-state political tradition was also popular amongst Korean intellectuals, who even developed anarchist political groups in the 1920s. Some of them produced the terrorist-style independence movement - assassinations, bombings. However, many anti-state political movements themselves maintained a strong desire to build an alternative state for Koreans.

Ever since the new state emerged in 1948, political conflict has developed along geographical lines. The political groups who dominated the state tried to utilize state authority to brand protesters and other political groups as anti-state. They portrayed counter-political actors and their activities as a dangerous rebellion against legitimized state authority. For the opposing political groups, the new state was not what they had wanted as replacement for the colonial experience: many state officials were former members of the Japanese colonial-state, who were prone to vicious suppression of these groups in the name of the state. The political characteristics of the South Korean state were developed in warfare with North Korea, eventually metamorphizing into the dictatorship of the Rhee regime, with a violent police force, and the enactment of anti-communist legislation. Anti-state political groups were excluded from any participation in the institutional politics of the parliament.

Even though the origin of the 'red complex' in Korea can be traced to the introduction of socialism and communism, if two major causes can be found, then these are, in turn, the colonial state's extreme dislike of these



ideologies and the Korean war. Many ex-state officials, such as the police, or soldiers, who were trained by the colonial state, had virtually no initiatives to intervene in the new political situation of the post-liberation period. However, the Rhee regime's active inclusion of them, through the creation of new roles for them in the state, together with the steamrolling of ideological conflicts, provided them with opportunities to overcome their problematic past. With anti-communist sentiment rife in the state, they intended to get rid of their most serious critics- the left political groups. Finally, after three years' warfare, conventionally known as the Korean war, they had cemented their survival in the state and Korean society.

The need for democracy in Korean politics started in a weak version, as the need for democratic institutionalization of parliamentary politics. The Rhee regime, as the center of the authoritarian state, was widely criticized for its undemocratic practices in state affairs and Parliament. Party politics in the 1950s also shows how fragile was the Rhee regime in maintaining a majority in parliament and how undemocratic it was in managing this situation. The emergence of opposition parties, after several fragmentations of center-right nationalist groups, was a significant consequence of the regimes' illegitimate activities. Disputes in parliamentary politics was the main business of political agendas in the 1950s, while democratic political actors outside of Parliament were hardly organized enough to present their own political visions.

<Historical Note>

1. In a meeting held on 27 March 1943, the US President, Roosevelt, suggested the trusteeship of Korea to the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, unlike its previous indifference to the occupation of Korea

by Japan - the USA had given its blessing to Japan in 1905. Dealing with Korea in the new international power structure after World War II, was regarded as one of the key elements for securing America's international position against the emerging communist powers, mainly centered on the USSR. According to Cumings (1981: 105), however, American planners elaborated their purpose by arguing the need for a more civilized Korean people and the promotion of international interest.

The trusteeship powers ... would "prepare and educate" the "dependent peoples" for self-government; they would "protect them from exploitation" and "promote their economic development and social justice." In addition, the following would be done by the trustees "in the interests of the world": the powers would maintain "nondiscriminatory commercial treatment," "promote equal economic opportunity," and "contribute to general security."

From this position, the USA drew the normative statement that 'Korea shall become free and independent' while adding the significant phrase 'in due course', at the Cairo Conference on 1 December 1943 with Great Britain and China. Through the meetings at Yalta on 8 February 1945 and Potsdam on 3 July 1945, America gained the agreement on trusteeship from Stalin, and finally suggested the line of the 38th parallel to the USSR on 10-11 August 1945 as the cornerstone of trusteeship. On 8 September 1945, the first US troops arrived in South Korea. General Hodge, the representative of the US troops, and the US politicians began to intervene in Korean domestic politics by refusing the authority of the governing body of Korea composed of several social and political groups, thus posing the dilemma in answering the question of who was the primary representative of the new state.

General Hodge and the US troops, who had to organize the trusteeship

process, did not have sufficient information on Korea and Koreans when they arrived in Korea. They had to depend on a few sources of knowledge and information in order to identify the Korean domestic situation and take charge of governmental organizations. Among the main sources were Japanese officers and bureaucrats and members of the Korean Democratic Party (henceforth KDP). Hodge announced, on 9 September that the colonial Japanese Government-General would continue to have a role with all of its Japanese and Korean personnel. "...From the beginning many Americans simply liked the Japanese better than the Koreans. The Japanese were viewed as cooperative, orderly, and docile, while the Koreans were seen as headstrong, unruly, and obstreperous". (Cumings: 1981: 138-9) Even though Hodge's official use of Japanese was overruled by the State Department in Washington and by MacArthur's critique, this did not stop him from relying on Japanese as unofficial informants and advisors. On the other hand, leading members of the KDP contacted US officers. Most of them were entrepreneurs, journalists and high-level officers who had close relationships with the Japanese ex-government. With their help, the US military regime (henceforth MG) acquired knowledge of Korea and its major political groups.

The USA, the UK, and the USSR discussed the issues of post-war problems in Moscow on 16 December 1945. As during the war, at Yalta and Postdam, the USA proposed a multilateral trusteeship for Korea. The proposal included the establishment of a joint administration of Korea by US and USSR military which would be replaced by a four-power trusteeship (the USA, the UK, the USSR, and China). The trusteeship would operate as the government, the legislative, and juridical body for five years. In addition, there was a provision for an additional five years,

if necessary. On the other hand, a draft by the USSR suggested providing 'a provisional Korean government' and a Joint Commission from the USSR and the US commands in Korea. In this, the Joint Commission offered assistantship in building the Korean government. The final draft of the agreement in Moscow produced an agenda for Korea, implicitly and explicitly, which was very sophisticated. The working out of an agreement concerning a four-power trusteeship of Korea for up to five years would be considered only after forming a government, and only after it had consulted with the Joint Commission.

The agreement showed the USA's changed attitude to Korea. The period of possible trusteeship was shortened, from twenty or thirty years to 'five years'. Then, the request of immediate independence, a self-established government of Korea, became to some extent acceptable. The USA came to realize that ignoring Korean political groups and the opposition was impossible. The early policies of the US command and the amicable dealings with Japanese officers provoked a social antagonism against the USA. General Hodge had claimed that Washington had to abandon trusteeship. Driven by the security strategy, one of the major policies of the MG was to identify the ideologies of Korean political groups. To facilitate governing the Southern part of Korea, MG officers classified political leaders and groups as their supporters, or as pro-Russian Communists. Under this classification, the place of the KPR was clearly not that of supporters. The KPR's authority as a governing body was denied, it was downgraded to a political organization. The MG formed an advisory council of the major political groups, to help its governance. This decision was a big mistake, because in the council, the hostility among groups was rather intensified.

By means of the policy that denied the major groups' governing authority, a certain public place was guaranteed for pro-Japanese collaborators, and through its inefficient management of the economy, the MG caused much social resentment of its authority. Moreover, a national demonstration for immediate independence forced the MG to give up its trusteeship strategy. Finally, the MG had no choice but to prove its friendship to Korea by changing its policy from trusteeship to independence.

## 5. Post-war developments of modernity in South Korea: modernity and power

### Introduction

The history of the South Korean state became problematic in post-liberation politics. Since inception, it faced serious political challenges from domestic political actors. The so-called Korean war was a boon for the state in helping it to get rid of counter-state actors from the political sphere. However, counter-state actors did not thereby disappear from politics for good, but were later reborn as radical political groups; in students' movements, workers' movements, and other forms of democratic movements outside of the parliamentary framework. Ironically, the state's excessive suppression, itself a reflection of its lack of legitimacy, is enough to provide infinite resources for the counter-state actors' resurrection.

While chapter 4 showed the initial formation of the historical antagonism between the state and counter-state actors, this chapter will deal with the development of post-war politics in terms of the extension of the antagonistic interplay between them. Post-war Korean politics conclusively reveals the dual developments in the political sphere, of the state's capability and that of counter-state actors at the same time. This political tension has been deeply influential for the development of the economic sphere as well: firstly, the scale of the South Korean economy's rapid growth and its content in terms of the change of industrial structures; secondly, the emergence of very strong and aggressive economic actors in conflictive relationship, which is rather unique in the Asian context.

This does not mean, however, that actors in the Korean case - the state, and counter-state actors - are equivalent in terms of their political power, social influence and economic capacities. Counter-state actors have always suffered from an asymmetric power relation, and in many cases were eliminated from politics. In spite of this, the conflictive relationship between them and the state continued to the 1990s. In order to develop a comprehensive picture of modernization, from the post-war years at least up until 1987, the state should be the focus of inquiry. For there is no doubt that it encouraged and provoked Korean society to respond to a state-guided modernization project. In this chapter, I will not simply argue the importance of the state for understanding a non-Western style of societal development. Nor will I merely assert the problematic influences of the state on the political sphere and economic activities. Rather, the aim of this chapter is to clearly show the overall manner in which the state, mainly, and counter-actors, partially, shaped their political and economic visions for modernization 'within an antagonistic relationship with critical responses to the alternative from the other'. In other words, I aim to identify the developing process of actors' value systems and their representation in the framework of an inter-dependent relationship. Without the other actor, who is critical of the first's modernization project, none of the two political actors' major characteristics could be properly understood.

## **5.1. The state as the organizer of modernization**

### ***5.1.1. The state and class relations in the Korean context***

One could question the categorical validity of the state as an independent political and economic actor, especially from a class perspective. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the theme of the autonomy of the state as an independent actor has mainly been developed under the influence of

Marxian traditions. Arguments have been mainly introduced in order to either support or criticize Marx and Engels's statement in *the Communist Manifesto* that: 'the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' (Marx and Engels, 1998: 37). The statement, it is said, clearly defines the fundamental character of the state in class conflict, focusing on the development of new economic conditions in Europe in the nineteenth century. However, many later social scientists have identified through historical observation that the relationship between the state and classes is a complex of coordinations and disputes, rather than a direct relationship of the state to the bourgeoisie. Despite arguments focusing on the instrumentality of the state-which has been taken by many social scientists to mean that the place of the state is subordinated to the bourgeoisie as a whole-, many states including the South Korean have enforced their autonomous, or even hegemonic, power on classes (CHOI Jang-jip, 1991). In spite of this critique, Marxian thinkers normally accept the statement's validity by distinguishing between short-term conflicts and subsequent long-term coordination in the relationship between the state and the dominating economic class. This debate is also rehearsed in Korean studies. Many, who argue the South Korean state's contribution to economic development, acknowledge the fact that it guided and controlled the bourgeoisie in military style. For them, the main contributor to Korea's economic growth is neither the bourgeoisie nor the working class: rather, they see the state as the means by which South Korea has become a distinctive economic success among developing countries. However, in labor studies, state intervention and its repressive labor policy have been regarded as an example of the anti-labor nature of the South Korean state, which consequently has supported the idea of the instrumentality under bourgeois



economic interest. The applicability of Marx's interpretation of the role of the state in class relations for the Korean context is doubtful. Firstly and most of all, the post-liberation situation in South Korea is so completely different from the European examples of economic transformation under the hegemonic power of the bourgeoisie to which Marx tried to politically respond. The bourgeoisie in the Korean context, who began their economic activities in the colonial period, suffered from critical disapproval of their collaboration with the colonial state. For this reason, they were unable to create a powerful political voice for themselves in determining the state's economic policies in their own image. Secondly, the bourgeoisie also suffered from the consequences of the War - the destruction of industrial facilities and of the infrastructure and the lack of financial capital. This meant that they had to depend on state subsidies for their new economic activities in the post-war period. Thirdly, the state, thus, took the initiative in major economic policies, especially in the reallocation of ex-industrial facilities - previously owned by the colonial state and Japanese - to the bourgeoisie, provoking internal competition among entrepreneurs. In other words, the economic sphere, just as much as the political sphere, was newly shaped by significant ruptures such that the bourgeoisie, despite being one of the main economic actors for developing capitalism, could not exclusively organize the economy according to their own interests.

Conversely, South Korea has been considered as an example of a state's successful intervention in the market by some political economists, especially since the 1980s and until the late 1990s (Amsden, 1989; Haggard and Moon, 1993, for example). Contrary to the liberalistic understanding of the role of the state- the 'market-friendly model'(World Bank, 1993), many political economists have argued that, until the financial

crisis of some developing countries in East Asia in 1997, South Korea as an example of an East Asian case - the so-called, Asian NICs, or Asian tigers - developed its economy through the state's effective interventions and planning: the political elite and technocrats in the state drove private sectors by means of major economic planning, selective support and subsidies, enforcement from time to time and strategic protection of domestic markets (see, Wade, 1992 for a review). However, in the political sense, the dominant role of the state in the market has provoked a conflictive tension between politics and the economy since 1980. It has been argued that state autonomy in policy-making and the executive process has decreased since the nation-wide labor movements of 1987, which changed situation so that authoritarian rule was no longer effective. Even a conflict between the state and a big conglomerate, Hyundai, can be seen in this light as the rebellion of the bourgeoisie against the authoritarian state (Eckert, 1993). The big conglomerates, which had developed rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s, came to find independent voices for criticizing the state's policies. Faced with several political ruptures and gradual democratization, the state's conventional intervention and control began to experience resistance and the close relationship between the political elite in the state and major entrepreneurs broke down. For entrepreneurs the main contributor to economic growth was not the state, but themselves, and they felt that the political elite in the state had become too corrupt. However, the political elite in the state felt that the big conglomerates had prospered only with state support, which their future was still dependent upon. The political elite, therefore, tried to maintain their superiority and dominance in finance and economic sectors, by utilizing political instruments and institutions to this end.

Such an analysis, given by a number of political economists, is very persuasive in terms of identifying the power relations between the state and its political elite and the entrepreneurs of major conglomerates, the so-called *Chaebol*. Inevitably, it becomes necessary to identify the underpinning reasons for the state's strong intervention in the economic sphere and how the interventionist policy has effectively worked. Without this, the autonomy of the state could be overestimated through ignorance of its problematic history. It is the political elite in the state, rather than the state itself, that shapes the way in which South Korea developed a state-centered modernization. They could enjoy their dominance in post-war politics, not because of their excellence in leading the restructuring of South Korea, but because of the lack of stable feedback processes in the political and economic sphere, and their exclusion of non-state actors from any monitoring of state policies.

#### ***5.1.2. The relationship between the state and state elite***

The state has constructed itself as the source of political power and handed to the state elite the responsibility for its legitimation. However, this needs to be clarified through an understanding of the particular historical context in which the Korean state developed. Firstly, distinctive political events after the colonial period have been devoted to constructing a new nation-state. Unlike many cases in Europe, where political actors presented their orientation 'for' or 'against' the state - so major political practices were designed to replace the previous state with the new one under their control, or at least to enforce the state to recognize actors' interests - in Korea, the initial political conflict, that set the trend for future politics, was directly related to the dominance of the state, rather than engagement with it. The state was regarded as an empty institution, waiting for its new owner in

the post-liberation period after the failure of the US military government's planning for a five-years' trusteeship of Korea, thanks to Korean actors' political protest. In spite of the formal existence of the state and its apparatuses, the US military could not successfully transfer the political authority of the state to Koreans peacefully. Not only is this because the US military government between 1945 and 1948 could not properly manage the political situation in which many left-wing political actors ignored state authority, but also because post-liberation politics was shaped by peoples' overwhelming desire to make a newly independent state as well as by the actual division of Korea according to US and Soviet interests. With the identification of unsolvable ideological differences, rebuilding the state became the *raison d'être* of some political actors' orientation for the South. In spite of left and centre-right groups' rejection of the idea of separation, some rightist groups finally achieved the formation of a constitutional assembly and the declaration of the new state, the Republic of Korea. As soon as the South Korean state had emerged, the power-holders in the state justified their political practices against anti-state political actors as the defence of state legitimacy. The usual selection process - from below or from outside of the state - for choosing representatives of the nation-state, became impossible with the emergence of two separate states in 1948. Besides, during the civil war in the 1940s and 1950s, the political elite in the state overcame their weak political legitimacy in terms of general support, not by 'persuading people' with their political and economic orientations in the public sphere, but by 'forceful execution' of their policies, excluding counter-partners and opponents from the political space. Here the state itself provided diverse functional instruments for dominant actors to justify their political orientations and ignore practical problems.

While some works on the theory of the elite in general and the political elite in particular and related empirical research on specific cases refer to existing socio-cultural mechanisms, or a plurality of these, as that which rather 'stably' reproduces a limited number of influential individuals who have certain privileges in dealing with socio-political and economic agendas and/or, could lead public opinions on these matters<sup>1</sup>, I focus in this chapter on the collective power-holders in the Korean state, who initiated a form of organized, authoritarian, modernization for nearly 40 years. As case studies of different nations show, it is rather problematic to investigate the role of the political elite for the Korean case under the assumption that the socio-cultural and political strata in Korea have been well-established through a long-term maintenance of certain class relations, or through a stabilized division of social institutions which have their own independent rules for reproducing privileged members. When the Korean case is compared to the Japanese, for example, in order to identify the role of the political elite and their actual power in dealing with state affairs and grand socio-economic programmes for modernization, the difference between the two cases is significant. While the Japanese political elite have a balance of counter-actors in the administrative sphere in the state and in private economic sectors, and while the elites in the three spheres together have produced coordinated practices for economic growth (Rothacher: 1993), the political elite in the South Korean state did not have counter-actors in the state and in economic sectors. Here, the political elite were the dominant power-holders over the administrative elite. Especially in the period of rapid industrialization, from the 1960s to the 1980s, major members of the

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1) Selected works include Pareto (1986, 1978, 1966), Moyser and Wagstaffe (1987), Putnam (1976), Rothacher (1993), Stanworth and Giddens (1974), Bourdieu (1996), Scott (1990).

political elite in the state had previously enjoyed high-flying careers in the military. Whereas the Rhee regime enjoyed dominant power in the 1940s and 1950s through the symbolic dictatorship of the former leader of independence movements, RHEE Sung-man, supported overall by the elite groups in the state who suffered from their problematic careers in the colonial state, the Park (박정희) regime (1961-1979), and the Jeon (전두환) regime (1980-1987) produced a political power based on military coups that controlled administrators and technocrats.

There are at least three characteristics which underscore the asymmetric power relations in the state. Firstly, the tensions among the agencies of each sphere, the political, economic, administrative, for example, whose professional interests seldom coincided with the dominance of the political elite, while the political elite in the state suffered from the counter-state actors' critique of their illegitimate occupation of the state and its undemocratic rule. Secondly, the absence of political voices from the administrative and economic elite, on the one hand, and their active participation in authoritarian modernization, on the other, are the two distinctive features of the 'developmental state' in the Korean context, while the overall political parallel was drawn between the state and counter-state actors in the process of modernization. Thirdly, whereas forming political power in the state under the auspices of the military has clearly broken down since the 1990s, the asymmetric power relation among several influential groups still remains, even though different types of political elite in turn have taken control of the state - this dimension will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Introducing the 'state elite' as the category for the overall grouping of

influential individuals in the state, regardless of their different positions in the power hierarchy in the government, the Parliament and judicial bodies, seems necessary for investigating the role of the state in modernization. They, above all, were the internal members of the state whose authority has been widely questioned and criticized by counter-state actors. If the failure of administrative branches and institutions other than the government to balance and monitor roles in the highly organized process of modernization, could be understood in the same way as organized military activities, as at least an indirect way of supporting an on-going problematic practice of state-centered socio-economic transformation through the category of the state elite, then the roles of several agents in the state becomes clearer. Secondly, the state elite themselves embedded absolute power in the state. In the powerful image of state authority, which was constructed in the process of excluding counter-actors, the state elite developed the idea of the absoluteness of the state which is more or less independent from the state elite's practical capacity. For the state elite intended to justify their legitimacy with the help of their political positions which were defined and guaranteed by the state. Neither as 'one' of the political groups, nor as the balancing power in the state, but as the very representative of the state, they differentiated their status from other dissident actors outside the state. Under a limited political legitimacy and with an underdeveloped modernization project which could not guarantee their political status in democratic politics, the state elite maintained their political life through deflecting attention to a symbolized image of the state as a building, an edifice, the absolute. In other words, the state elite has been protected by the state which was developed for their purpose. However, this absoluteness of the state generated hostility against the state elite, once the differentiation of state and state elite occurred. In the process of an

increasing symbolization of the state, the state elite became de-valued and anonymous. For example, when the new state elite gained its position consequent to political rupture - in 1960, the collapse of the Rhee regime and the beginning of the second republic, in 1961, the occurrence of the military coup and the beginning of the third republic, in 1980, the reoccurrence of a military coup, the suppression of the democratic movement in Kwangju and the beginning of the fifth republic, in 1993, the emergence of the first civilian regime, and in 1998, the reformist, KIM Dae-Jung, government - the previous state elite faced political ruin, unable to maintain its political status, neither as distinctive counter-partners in the political sphere, nor as members of the administrative elite. Their political legitimacy could only be maintained with the state's protection. Without the shield of the state, no political actors could survive their political weaknesses and practical problems. Thus, each political actor became obsessed with the state for two reasons inferred from the political phenomenon of state absoluteness: firstly, state authority itself is the main protector of the state elite; secondly, actors alienated from the state are easy targets for the state elite's political critique and repression.

If I approximately introduce the term 'objectification' in the Simmelian sense (1978), or 'alienation' in the Marxian tradition (Lukacs, 1971 for example) in terms of the emergence of the situation in which the subjects, who initially created an overall socio-economic architecture, as rule-makers, become mere rule-followers later, the state in its relationship to the state elite in the Korean context, could be regarded as objectified or as an alienated source of power for political actors. While they are fully secured in the state as the state elite, as soon as they become isolated from the state they unveil their political fragility. Of course, this type of politics,



which puts 'position over ability' rather than inverse, was the consequence of illegitimated actors' gaining control over the state and their justifications being dependent on the role of the state, as it was being molded under modernization programmes.

### 5.1.3. *The state as an initiator of modernization*

It seems useful to construct a table, in order to grasp more clearly the overall picture of state-guided modernization, although there are some overlapping elements and different levels of categorization in it.

	Economic sphere	Political sphere	Cultural sphere
<b>Vision</b>	- Wealthy and Industrialized Nation	- Democratization - Unification	- Restoration of national pride
<b>Task</b>	- Fast economic growth - Restructuring Industries	- Anti-Communism	- Maintenance of Collective Identity
<b>Practical Strategy</b>	- Intervention into the market	- Anti-North Korean Ideology	- Rediscovery of Korean Identity
<b>Government policies</b>	- Anti-labor Policy - Changing Economic Structure - Upbringing Chaebols	- Repression of counter-state actors - Over-emphasized parliamentary politics	- New spirit campaign - Revealing national history for modernization
<b>Counter-actors</b>	- Workers, farmers, some Chaebols	- Democrats, students, radical intellectuals	- Traditionalists, new generations
<b>Consequences</b>	- Industrialization	- Authoritarianism	- Identity crisis
<b>Crises</b>	- Serious Economic disputes - Breakdown of developmental state	- Limited political freedom - continuous political instability - Regionalism	- Collectivism vs. Individualism - Traditionalism vs. Modernism

Table I. The state elite's modernization programmes

It is interesting to see how the state elite have represented their visionary

modernization project and their practical legitimation process in it, on the extensive basis of an identification of an emergent absoluteness of the state, resulting in unbalanced power relations between the state elite and counter-state actors. These visions, a wealthy and developed nation, democratization and unification, and the restoration of national pride, were developed on the level of state policies as the form for strategies of modernization. For the capitalist development of the economy, the state elite intended to direct intervention into the market, so as to develop domestic industry. The result was that major conglomerates became established over several stages (see, Caiden and Jung, 1985 for the case of the Park regime). At the same time, anti-communism was concretized as the antagonistic policy against North Korea and as repression of domestic counter-actors.

Unlike the economic and political perspectives, however, the strategy in the cultural sphere was hardly developed for two reasons: firstly, the emphasis on a cultural restoration of Confucian ethics was initiated for the instrumental purpose of increasing economic performance and generating political support (KIM Kwang-Ok, 1996). Traditional cultural characteristics were utilized by the state where its value-systems and practical ethics could be harnessed for modernization. Without long-term policies, constructed cultural heritages provided temporary justifications for participants, although the tension between the adopted advanced western industrialization process and the maintenance of traditional culture was clearly visible. Changing the economic structure of a whole society has sometimes faced its biggest challenge, not from politics, but from people's cultural attitude. With the assumption that peoples' life-styles, which were tied to traditional values, were irreconcilable with rationalized economic behavior, the state elite

became critical of several traditional customs, promoting instead a change-oriented social attitude for peoples' everyday lives. The state elite's contradictory attitude toward culture, meant that it was unable to develop an overall concrete strategy for it.<sup>2</sup>

In many political discourses, the economy weighs more heavily than politics itself. The Korean case be considered as the prototype of economy-centered politics in developing countries, where the development of political democracy has been suspended under the ideology advocating organized participation for economic growth. Most legislative issues in the Parliament were directly or indirectly related to economic planning and its practice, and economic performance was the main indicator for the success, or not, of governmental activity. Further, political activities and organizations were restricted under special laws to prohibit economic disputes. In fact, most parts of the modernization project consisted of a one-dimensional economic orientation. Adapting Hart-Landsbeg (1993)'s term, all 'rush to (economic) development.' Here, in terms of the state elite's involvement and its political consequences - the long-term maintenance of authoritarianism, for

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2) KIM Kwang-Ok (1996: 217-8) investigates the changed relationship between the state and the advocates of Confucianism:

'The tension between the military regime and the Confucians heightened when Park Chung-hee[the President] criticized the literati tradition in his election campaign. ... he openly criticized Kim Seong-il as an example of a narrow-minded Confucian scholar who lacked a sense of responsibility toward the nation and who wasted national energy on empty theory and futile debate. This provoked serious counterattacks by the Confucians throughout Kyungbuk province, the very base of political support for Park. ... In order to solidify his political resources under the strong influence of Confucian tradition, Park renovated Confucian relics, including the Tosan Seowon, and printed the likeness of T'oebye and Yulgok on paper currency. The government also provided financial support for local lineages to open private museums honoring their scholar ancestors. Local Confucians understood this series of actions by Park as an expression of nationalism and respect for the national culture and history molded by the Confucian tradition.'

example - the construction of an economy-oriented attitude in politics needs to be questioned as follows: did South Korea have any particular socio-historical conditions that facilitated a ready acceptance of the economy-centered modernization project by the people?; what was the state elite's intention behind this and what were its political implications? There have been at least two approaches for the investigation of the origin of the economy-centered modernization project: one is to identify the objective socio-historical situation until 1961, the year of the first military coup. Under that approach, the peoples' condition of extreme poverty, political instability, and social disorder are mainly highlighted (PARK Jeong-Hee, 1961). This situation is regarded as the very source for peoples' acceptance of the state elite's modernization project. The other gives more emphasis to the state elite's strategic justification process in order to politically legitimate their political coup. From this perspective, the state elite's strong authoritarian rule is considered as a direct instrument by which continuous political conflicts were forcefully stopped and people were guided to their economic interests. In terms of persuasion and justification, the state elite clearly stand as the subject, producing persuasive reasons for people, on the one hand, and facing the situation in which they had to justify their illegitimate political activities, on the other. The economy-centered modernization project was developed in the relationship between the state elite and the people, rather than preexisting as a desire of the people to see a strong state with clear economic vision. In the continuity of political confrontation between left and right, and state and anti-state democrats, the people recognized a possibility for political development and democracy in 1960, after the collapse of the Rhee regime following nation-wide political protests. The peoples' expectations in that year were for transparent administrative management, the de-construction of authoritarian state

institutions, the expulsion of the problematic state elite, the development of the relationship with North Korea, and the development of the economy. An assertion that argues that over-inflated political freedom was an obstacle to economic development, was not powerful in public discourse at this time. Even though there was a negative perception of the Rhee Regime's economic policies, the main cause of economic underdevelopment was not the regime's inability, but the consequences of the War and the unsolved legacy of Japanese colonialism for the economic structure. The diminution of politics and increased economic values in the public sphere was the work of the military elite who dominated the state in 1961. They forcefully stopped on-going political discourse, reshaped political geography into formal politics, and excluded collective political actions and organizations outside of parliament- see, the government policies in the table. Moreover, they produced new political issues through which they dominated the media, for example, many campaigns for societal reform, aimed at corruption, gangsters, the propaganda of state reform, and emphasis on the threat of North Korea. They intended to construct a reformative image of the state, both as transparent and a leading force for change, and as the absolute image of the state which forbids other actors to attack it. Thus, the military elite's control narrowed political activities, changing the political discourse into a newly shaped formal politics, through which they oversaw both the creation of issues and their distribution in public debate.

It was the state elite that initiated modernization, not only in the economic, but also in the socio-political sphere. Under absolute state authority, they had the plenipotentiary power to manage social resources, to utilize major state institutions and to produce political ideology. With an undeveloped institutionalization for political feedback and monitoring in the public

sphere, most Koreans readily accepted their modernization project and participated without strong critique. However, in common with other underdeveloped political systems, the degree of industrialization was very low (Haggard, Kang and Moon, 1997), raw materials and resources were very rare, on account of the exploitation of Japanese colonialism and the War, and skilled workers and experienced managers were lacking. One of the distinguishing features of the state elite, in terms of reshaping the whole of society, including public institutional systems and the people, was above all its ability to provoke people to participate in the project. Enforcement, violence and authoritarian practices, existed side-by-side with the implanting of voluntary motivations and guidance for collective participation, under the strategy of an economy-centered modernization.

In the overall picture of the state elite's modernization project, the economy provided the motivation, politics served as the restraining instrument, and culture the persuasive tool in a diversity of practical applications. Under the experience of extreme poverty and the recognition of the economic abundance of advanced industrialized countries - the USA, the rise of the Japanese economy, for example -, an orientation toward economic development became widely accepted, but only once the political sphere had been shaped by the dictatorship of the military elite in the state. However, in the context of ideological conflict, the path of economic development was capitalist, while any type of social democratic alternative was ruthlessly eliminated with all its political implications. The state elite utilized an implanted anti-communism, in politics and legislation, to limit political activities critical of their modernization projects in the name of national security. The state elite, though, also argued for a restoration of national pride as its vision and promoted strong nationalist ideas in the

cultural space of history. The embedding of national pride in cultural discourse displays an emphasis on the modernist tradition. As I mentioned in chapter 2, the discourse on *Silhak* was part of an intellectual contribution to modernization. A widely spread public sentiment, despite ideological manipulation, that the country had neither economic wealth, nor imperialist political power in world politics, nor wide territories or abundant natural resources, provoked a grand desire for people to distinguish their cultural difference, on the national level, from others. Collective behavior and community-oriented life styles were mobilized as the substance of a cultural distinctiveness, for example. Moreover, traditional social orders based on age distinction and the obedient attitude to seniors were emphasized as positive heritages from traditional culture. They became the method of the cultures of organized modernization.

To sum up, within the overall architecture of authoritarian modernization between the 1960s and the 1980s, the role of politics and cultural activities became instrumentalized toward achieving a certain economic performance. While the vision in the economic sphere has to some extent been achieved, the political vision has been suspended, as part of the emergency measures for economic growth, and the cultural vision has been dependent on economic performance. At the level of practical strategy and government policies, the state has controlled possible counter-actors and raised nationalistic sentiments at the same time. As the overall effects of state-guided societal transformation in authoritarian style, industrialization, authoritarianism and identity crisis respectively have occurred in the three spheres. One of the main causes for this situation is the unbalanced development of the three spheres, which did not have their own mechanisms for solving emerging problems, because of a lack of

independent agents to alternatively suggest different visions and display practical capabilities in these spheres. In fact, when the state elite allocated different resources to the three spheres for modernization programmes, they hardly conceived the possibility of institutional divisions that could possibly lead to the emergence of strong counter-actors, critical of authoritarian modernization. However, as each sphere was shaped by the modernization process, counter actors against state policies arose.

#### ***5.1.4. The relationship between 'authoritarian modernization' and the development of state institutions***

Two major interpretations on the meaning of state institutions are considered for the Korean case: major economic and political institutions were positively created and managed for the purpose of modernization (Cheng, Haggard and Kang, 1998; KANG David, 1995); while at the same time, they are privately utilized to secure the state elite's political status. The first is certainly related to economic development, and the second is concerned with political problems. The balancing of these two perspectives provided practical justification for the state elite and critical evidence for counter-actors. At the same time, many social scientists keep one of the two perspectives for their comparative understanding of the Korean case, except for a new trend in which the institutional systems' inefficiency and irrelevance are criticized (Matthews, 1998). In order to understand the process that develops state institutions, we need to examine, firstly, the internal logic of the political elite in the state which is concerned with modernization, and secondly, their practical ways for accomplishing modernization projects.



It is not easy to generalize the process of institutionalization of state organizations as a whole, of course, not only because each organization is designed for a specific functional purpose, but also because their establishment, change and disappearance are related to specific social circumstances. Under acknowledgement of this difficulty, however, it is possible to narrow the configuration, based on the respective social circumstances, so that if one can isolate the institution builders' intentions and interests, institutions' 'initial activities' and their directions could be identified. For institution builders, the institutions' initial activities, at least, are oriented toward positively furthering their own purpose. Additionally, it is through this purpose, that the direction of practices is decided at the same time. The degree of autonomy of institutions against the institution builders is minimal at this early stage. However, this can increase when agents develop their own decision-making process that is autonomous from external authority. In the early stage, institutions and agents are necessarily dependent on the institution builders' help in providing resources, for example, labor power, budgets, and other materials. From the Rhee regime (1948-1960) to the Jeon regime (1980-1987) state institutions developed under authoritarian leaders. During that period (1948-1987) state institutions' basic frameworks, work areas and human resources were basically constructed and prepared. A considerable adaptation of Japanese and American institutions, developing infrastructures, the creation of many jobs, and advanced higher education systems in quantity and quality were significant at this time. In order to acquire increased state management for modernization, state institutions were organized.

In fact, the influence of the political elite who had military careers in the state, for the making and managing of state institutions was very

prominent.<sup>3</sup> Political actors, as the organizers for 'authoritarian modernization', had a big influence on the activities of state institutions. The formation of asymmetrical power relations in the state, between the government and parliament, on the one side, and the judicial body - the courts - on the other, enabled an undemocratic management of the state. In political actors' perspectives, however, the undemocratic situation was regarded, in practice, as a necessary condition for rapid modernization, rather than as a denial of democracy itself. For political actors in the state, political stability was a prerequisite for economic development. They persuaded people to accept limited democracy as much as they enforced it with violent and authoritative methods. Considerable economic growth provided a justification for the political actors, and for a certain time, people seemed to accept the limited political situation. Even though economic growth was their goal, while political stability was their method, the reverse is also true; economic growth was the most important instrument for extending state actors' political status. Under the perspective of political stability, none of the regimes could secure its position for long

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3) The role of the army as one of the major modernizing agents in developing countries with colonial experiences has been an area of interest for modernization theory. As Pye (1996) argues, the army in the developing countries was one of the rare organizations which had institutional capability, as well as physical power, to manage the reorganization of the state suffering from political instability. Given the fact that modernization theory as such intended to find any socio-political resource for efficiently promoting political and economic development in the developing countries, it did not seem absurd that policy scientists in that perspective identified the army as a strong political agent through which development programmes could be effected.

without people's support, except for the colonial occupation and the war-time situation. The increased necessity of peoples' voluntary support of political power, based on democratic procedure, and a developed political openness in which all the political elite submit plausible reasons for their activities for maintaining or expanding their political status, are significant for the modern political world. What is characteristically called economic success, especially quantitative growth and the creation of many jobs, has been regarded as one of the major instruments for political stability. And this especially for undemocratic and authoritative political elites in developing countries, where the ruling elite's political lives are more dependent on visible economic growth. Economic development shores up the weak political legitimation which comes from a violent state origin and its arbitrary management. The Korean case is a clear example, not only because major political ruptures caused by nation-wide protests were due to economic depression, but also because the state elite's obsession with economic growth in modernization projects was the preferred political method.

However, my understanding of the relationship between the political stability of the state and economic growth in South Korea, does not start from the popular conception of the correlation between the total political negativity of the state elite and its economic success. The so-called 'developmental state', has been recognized as a key term for understanding the nature of the state in developing countries, and its contribution to economic growth has generally been accepted in Korean studies. Accordingly, most of the literature tends to draw specific conclusions from the Korean case: firstly, that the state should actively intervene/guide private sectors' business strategies in the early stages of economic planning;

secondly, the state should engineer social circumstances to facilitate competitive conditions for export; thirdly, the state should selectively distribute resources, finance for private sectors (see, Amsden, 1989 for example). Unlike its economic contribution, the state has been directly and indirectly criticized for its way of prescribing social and political problems--an undemocratic politics, the undermining of social movements, poorly-developed welfare, for example--and pointing out its harsh interventions in economic disputes between labor and capital (see, LEE Tae-Ho, 1984, for example). Under this ambivalent evaluation that lauded its maximized economic positivity and criticized its political negativity, however, a question remains: why did South Korea have for over 30 years such a significant interdependence between economic growth and undemocratic politics? Two ideal answers offer themselves: an undemocratic control of the political sphere enables South Korea to promote fast economic growth; its economic success consequently maintained undemocratic politics for a long time. Both answers seem unsatisfactory. Not only do they place undue emphasis on economic performance, but also the two factors in the correlation are simply located as independent variables in the distinction between 'cause' and 'effect'. In the broad social context where many factors are closely linked, a functional distinction between 'cause/effect' and 'result/consequence' is less persuasive. Firstly, the distinction between the independent variable and the subsequent variable is quite unrealistic in the investigation of the relationship between economic development and democracy, because many components in the logic for choosing the path to rapid economic development also impact on political discourse. Secondly, in the early stage of modernization, when state institutions were underdeveloped, they were showing, like a human embryo in its mother's womb, the operating modes of economic systems and political behavior as

more significantly interrelated. Before each institution had developed its own internal logic of quasi-autonomous development, the relationship between economic planning, and political practices was like two sides of a coin, rather than two independent entities. The argument that economic growth and undemocratic politics are related to each other in the Korean context, is also problematic, if the historical process is ignored, because it appears too simplistic, lacking a deeply-investigated explanation of the developing process of correlation between the economy and politics. For the Korean case, it is important to keep in mind that economic growth, the expansion of infrastructures and state institutions, political conflicts, the emergence of authoritarian regimes and their disappearance, and so on, were correlated from the beginning. In other words, each social event had an expanded impact on others, and likewise was impacted upon by them in an amplified process.

At the same time, I do not agree with the critique of the state elite that depicts the military elite as in total control of state institutions over two decades (1961-1987). Even though they were decision- and policy-makers, and legislators, influencing state institutions according to their interests, it is difficult to see state institutions as fully under their control. State institutions were not isolated forms, separate from political actors' modernization projects, but political actors were also to some extent the very subject of developing state institutions. Building modernized state institutions is also a part of the modernization project, because well-developed institutions and experienced officers for carrying out projects, were rare. State institutions and political actors developed, not in competitive and fully conflictive relations, but together, as inter-supportive supplements. The political actors in the state existed as internal developers

of institutions themselves.

Many political actors with state power offered visionary planning ideas for the modernization of South Korea: the Rhee regime's 'immediate independence and building of the new state' in the 1940s and the 'reconstruction of the nation' after the War, the Park regime's 'Restoration of national economy' and the 'new spirit for building a new nation', the Jeon regime's 'stabilization of politics' and 'continuous economic development', and so forth. Even though there were unjustifiable political problems emanating from their fragile legitimacy, and exacerbated by rather violent closures of the political sphere, these visionary projects were not usually criticized, at least on the macro-level. In other words, most critiques of political actors in political discourse mainly focused on the arbitrary decisions on the practical level, rather than on the ideal basis for the modernization project.

A particular social phenomenon, namely, the process of a developing state elite as the very condition for developing counter-actors' capacities - for example, the more the state elite presented their authoritative modernization in an enforced form, the more serious were the counter-actors' resistance and critique - has been the basis of the argument that South Korea has a strong civil society as much as a powerful state, a reasoning that criticizes the idea of unbalanced power relations between a strong authoritative state and a naive civil society. The counter-state actors, however, who developed through reflexive practices reacting against the state in post-war politics, did not appear to have strong ideologies to match the state elite's organized modernization programmes, although it is still necessary to take account of their political power. I will here investigate the counter-state actors' rather ambivalent political growth, under the premise that strong

counter-actors would not have emerged if a strong authoritarian state had not existed.

The process, in which counter-actors' capacities increased, shows two distinctive causes contributing to this development: the first cause is the objective socio-economic circumstances produced mainly by the state elite's modernization projects and consequent transformation of Korean society; the second is counter-actors' own active critique of state-centered modernization and their political confrontation with the state. The first cause has been illustrated by way of describing the continuous reproduction of political problems and the weak foundation for the legitimacy of the state elite and state institutions, which provided opportunities for the critical practices of counter-actors. The second cause is rather due to counter-actors' subjective condition, which had an impact on their choosing a particular pattern of critique. Counter-state actors, alienated from the establishment of institutions, have shown a tendency to criticize institution builders, by arguing the unjust appropriation of institutions, rather than denying the legitimacy of the institution itself or criticizing the institutions' functionality. In other words, the critique of state institutions focused on their instrumentality for private interests, rather than emphasizing their functional problems. For example, when the National Security Law (국가보안법) was criticized in the public sphere, in most cases, it was condemned for its contribution to the ruling state elite's political security and its consequent unfairness on democrats and opposed party members, who became subject to political attack (PARK Won-Soon, 1993). Opposition parties and democrats in parliamentary politics, in particular, were wont to stress their idealistic view on the role of institutions. For them, institutions should be fair in practice, such that the outcome should have no harmful

consequences for themselves. In the limited public sphere in which socialist and communist views cannot be freely discussed, counter-actors' choice starts with the usage of limited political resources, contained within the narrowed boundary of public discourse. Even though the disclosure of unfair execution is in principle inevitable for evaluating state institutions, excessive fondness of it and remaining silent about functional problems deriving from the initial setting of institutions, consequently helped to maintain the limits of the public space. The history of the National Security Law shows that counter-actors' one-dimensional critique was subsequently devoted to formal amendment and improvement of the law, rather than its abolition. Ever since the emergence of the state, formal politics in Parliament has never deconstructed the initial political setting that excluded any socialist or communist perspective, including the social democratic one, for modernization.

## **5.2. The contradiction between rupture and continuity in the political changes**

### ***5.2.1. Rethinking the relationship between state and civil society***

There have been two distinctive perspectives on the theme of 'state and civil society' in Korean Studies. The first is to emphasize the state's dominance and ignorance of civil rights in practicing policies. It argues that South Korea has a strong state and a weak civil society, so to speak. The thesis of a strong state versus weak civil society, which was popular until the early 1980s as the critique of the authoritarian character of the South Korean state, seems not persuasive as an explanation for the rise of social and political movements since the 1980s. It can neither explain the gradual increase on the demands of democratic rules and the state's reforming



process, nor account for the emergence of diverse social movements and their dynamic developments. The second focuses, as the critique of the first, on the significant development of social movements after 1987. It insists that South Korea has not only a strong state but also a strong civil society, so that both seriously clash over public agendas. The thesis of a strong state versus a capable civil society, which burgeoned during the 1990s (see, CHOI Jang-jip, 1993; Koo, 1999, for example), regards the status quo of democracy in South Korea as significantly developed, although, at the same time, the authoritarian character of the state does not disappear completely.

Both approaches seem to me unsatisfactory for two reasons. Firstly, their understandings of the relationship between the state and civil society are problematic in that both presuppose the separate existence of state and civil society under a conflictive perspective as alienated and independent social bodies. Secondly, none of the approaches provides arguments for the co-existence of political ruptures, the continuity of the authoritarian state, and, finally the end of the authoritarian state. The status quo of the state is not independent from that of civil society. The state emerged as the product of political interactions between actors in social spaces who were involved in a historical situation, as the Korean case clearly illustrates.

In efforts to highlight the significance of the state as an autonomous actor, analyses conducted in the statist perspective often ignore that the state is embedded in society and draws its essential characteristics from society itself. Both state autonomy and state strength are the products of interactions between the state and society, in which even a weak society finds diverse ways to influence state structure. ... The state must continuously compete with social groups and classes to maintain control over the people and their behavior, and the state's control many change significantly from one sector to another and from one issue to another. (Koo, 1993: 5-6).

While Koo's argument correctly points out the relationship between state and society beyond giving undue weight to either, his thesis also needs to be modified in order to understand the process of how a group of political actors achieved state power and utilized it to maintain its political influence. The relationship between the state and the state elite in the Korean context, which I have introduced in the previous section, shows how the state, which was initially instrumentalized by some political actors, gained symbolic power over political actors. Generally speaking, through power struggles, compromises, consensus or their admixture, the state emerged, developed and changed. If a state has been maintained for a long time, it indirectly signals, at least, the capacity of the state to sustain the status quo. However, the capacity of the state does not come from the state itself. Rather, it comes from the social space that is covered by the activities of the state and the people involved in the state's activities. The state exists, not as rules and institutions which control civil society from outside, but as one of the selected resources and methods, in fact as the most certain and reliable resource and method, of some members of civil society.

How, then, should the conflictive situation in which the state seems to oppress social movements and civil rights in the Korean case, be understood? It is the social conflict between the formalized will of members of civil society transcendentalized to the functions of state, on the one hand, and, on the other, the alienated will, from the state, of other members of civil society. In other words, the conflict between the state and civil society is the manifestation of the very conflict between different members of civil society. The state elite are also members of civil society. They propagate their own visionary wills, which come from lives in civil

society, in a political space, namely the state. Under this kind of reasoning the discourse on 'State and Civil society' should be re-designated as 'competition and conflict between political subjects having visionary modernization projects'. In the Korean case, social and political conflicts between subjects of modernization took shape as the maintenance of the strong authoritarian state over a long duration and across several political ruptures. Significant here was the formation and development of the conservative network, which had charismatic leaders at the center, and proposed a hierarchical shape for the state. The 'restoration of South Korea based on economic prosperity under a capitalist perspective, on liberal democracy excluding communism and socialism' was their abstract for modernization. They needed a well-organized state for the rapid accomplishment of this task and produced remarkable economic growth through aggressive mobilization of the state power.

***5.2.2. The co-existence of several political ruptures and the continuity of the authoritarian state***

As I mentioned briefly before, several political ruptures and the continuity of the authoritarian state have overlapped in the Korean experience. The understanding of these phenomena is useful for rethinking the relationship between state and civil society, on the one hand, and for recognizing how political stability has been maintained and broken, on the other. In a broad sense, the causes of political ruptures can be found in political problems and economic crises. Especially when both political and economic causes are inter-linked, the state of political instability is sharply increased.

For Korean politics, every constitutional change of republic occurred as consequence of political confrontations beyond electoral politics. The first

republic was sunk by national demonstrations in 1960. The second republic, emerging directly from this, was abolished by military coup in 1961. The third republic, based on military power, was replaced by the fourth republic, ostensibly to cement the permanent presidency of the leader in 1972. The fourth republic was abruptly destroyed by the assassination of the president in 1979. Then, the fifth republic, emerging from the violent occupation of the state by the military elite in 1980, was ended by national protests in 1987. Each republic failed to sustain its political authority: the Rhee regime (1948-1960) was attacked by left groups and their armed resistance to its origin; the Park regime (1961-1979) and other military regimes (1980-1992) were blamed and challenged by democrats, because of their occupation of the state based on military coups; even the first civilian government, the Kim regime (1993-1998), was criticized as a conservative alliance that abandoned democratic tradition.<sup>4</sup> It becomes apparent, then, that the political fragility, which leads to the inability to maintain a stable state authority, comes, firstly, from the regimes' 'ontic weakness'. All regimes finally failed to maintain political legitimacy. Even though each regime tried to justify its decisions and activities as unavoidable given the situation of the nation, their ontic problems derived from its respective origins that were permanently criticized by counter-political actors and people. A lack of legal foundation in the genesis of the regime - the problem of military coup -, was followed by an undemocratic management of the state by the state-elite. The sudden change in the constitution, the violence exercised by the state apparatuses, the immoral social networking, corruption (HAHM Chaibong (1997) for the KIM Young-sam government), are all examples introduced by counter-state actors as resources for political

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4) See, Kang and Moon (1995) for the implications of the military intervention in politics.

critique of each regime in the state. However, it should be borne in mind that the moment of concrete political rupture is more or less determined by economic reasons. When people were unsatisfied with the economy, the undemocratic features of the state were regarded as an unendurable social status quo. Many political ruptures and abrupt abolitions of regimes, were produced in just such a situation. The reverse side is, that when economic development is clearly distinguishable, political problems are accepted by the people, to some extent, at least until 1987. However, nation-wide democratic movements and workers' strikes in 1987 were not mainly based on economic decline. They were caused by a fundamental political concern with the state elite's constitutional change, and concern with the social transformation co-extensive with economic development. A widely spread confrontation between labor and capital overlapped with the raising of the issue of democracy. Aggressive proponents of modernization - the state elite, entrepreneurs, conservative intellectuals -, clashed with victims of the project- democrats, workers, the urban poor, students and so forth. The demand for democracy and the redistribution of welfare could not be solved by the old-fashioned authoritarian management of the state.

However, what is striking is the fact that the authoritarian state continued despite several political ruptures that anticipated an improved democratization. In spite of democratic movements on a national scale, in 1960 and 1979/80, which were powerful enough to destroy the authoritarian state, military coups rebuilt a new authoritarian state. Besides, on an overall estimation, the authoritarian state lasted for nearly 50 years. Here I would like to raise a question as to how authoritarian regimes could exist for such a long time and what is the main reason of this phenomenon. Through the iron rule of National Security Law? Anyone conversant with

the authoritarian states' undemocratic and violent governing styles would probably cite political dictatorship as the answer. However, this is not fully persuasive, in that the maintenance of political power depends not only on passive subordination, but also on voluntary support. Here I would like to investigate this second aspect in the Korean case.

Until the armistice of 1953, the state elite mainly used political and military methods to minimize counter-actors' resistance. The National Security legislation of 1949 and its violent enactment was very effective in protecting the authority of the state from anti-state or anti-government groups. Ideological conflicts and the War provided further justification for their violent practices. Even though the initial setting of the state was problematic and unstable, its longevity enabled the state elite to develop public institutions. When the military and police as well as judicial organizations functioned for maintaining stability in the political sphere, administrative organizations were charged with providing national reconstruction projects. The restoration of ruined infrastructures and the provision of the necessities of life for people, were the main tasks of bureaucrats. The Rhee Regime distributed limited materials, social resources and public finances in a selective way to the private sector. Many entrepreneurs, who had been educated and trained under Japanese colonialism, and their facilities, were reintroduced as part of national reconstruction projects. The allocation of scarce materials and the provision of financial support by the state elite in this period, is enough to illustrate a social process which can be easily identified in developing countries. One of the main aims of modernization projects is, of course, to increase economic growth in a short period by way of developing economic infrastructures. In an early modernization period, many more resources, for

example, materials, finance, labor power, were needed than in any other period. However, the lack of materials, finance, and advanced labor power were also prominent in that period. At the same time, development plans were normally dominated by a few planners and decision makers. In other words, the need for rapid economic development, given limited initial infrastructures and social resources and a secured planning and decision-making directorship, insulated from social feedback and restraints, compose the basic social circumstances in developing countries.

Corruption has often emerged in the period of developing economic institutions. In the Korean context, corruption has no doubt had an institutional foundation (KONG Tat Yan, 1996). The state elite needed successful economic indicators to secure their political status. For them, visible economic growth has been regarded as the most important tool through which their political lives are guaranteed and their problematic political activities are to some extent justified. Selected entrepreneurs in selected industries were encouraged to show economic growth and 'compensated' through the receipt of special subsidies. Helped by protectionist policies that forbade foreign development investment and financial aid, the textile industry and related industries enjoyed fast economic growth. They also provided some black political funding for the ruling Liberal Party. The Rhee regime spent much money on several elections, from political funds which were illegally gathered in the private sector. One of the main critiques of the Rhee regime in 1960, was not the disaster of its economic policy, but the subsequent rebates between the Rhee regime and entrepreneurs that were depicted as problematic economic relations. What should be made clear in any analysis of corruption, is that every regime was deeply involved in corruption between the state elite and

big entrepreneurs, although all of them had manifested a 'clean politics', criticizing previous regimes' corruption (PARK Byeong-Seong, 1995; KIM Chang-kuk, 1997; KIM Byong-Seob, 1998). It can be argued that the authoritarian developmental state and big conglomerates, *Chaebols*, are interdependent, for political stability and company expansion. However, hegemony between them was always on the state side.

As mentioned above, state institutions were dominated by 'development-oriented aggressive modernizers', who constructed conservative networks. It is very interesting to understand the asymmetrical relations between government, legislature and the judiciary body in the conservative triangle. The subsequent positions of the parliament and the court, were due to the authoritarian and violent practices of a few political groups, including the military elite, expanding their political space. The reconstruction of the state organization and the elimination of the previous state elite by military coups, especially, were significant enough to ignore criticism from other state institutions, and to get rid of critique altogether. This political enforcement, however, cannot effectively explain the maintenance of undemocratic politics and unbalanced power relations in the South Korean state over the long term.

Political groups and a few charismatic leaders, as modernizing agents, have played a major role in developing a more organized and advanced form of the state. What is characteristic, as much as their intervention and enforcement in developing state institutions, is the fact that the political groups produced a visionary modernization project which was shared by others in the state elite, including high bureaucrats, who eventually came to accept these political actors' problematic occupation of state power, their



economic planning and their value systems for culture and national security. Military regimes, especially, provided a certain opportunity for emerging technocrats to practise their economic and industrial visions, for ambitious individuals to gain prominence in Parliament and for political prosecutors to enjoy significant political powers and high social status. As well as the support of the conservative formation in the state, nation-wide support for the state is also visible. This, thanks to the authoritarian state's development-oriented modernization projects, that created many jobs, not only in the economic sphere, but in social and political institutions geared to the reorganizing of Korean society and through its introduction of welfare policies at the basic level. Accordingly, the people's implicit acceptance of the problematic state that produced palpable economic benefits, contributed to the long term maintenance of a 'strong state', as much as did the newly emerging bureaucrats, technocrats, civil servants and other participants, who were enjoying increased activity under state institutions.

**Conclusion: the state as organizer of strong programmes of societal development**

While chapter 4 was concerned with the historical origin of the state crisis, in terms of the emergence of a state authority lacking legitimation, this chapter has analyzed the overall policy direction of the South Korean state and the state elite. The South Korean state *after* the Korean war - or at the stage of post-military conflict in the on-going process of war -, has pursued a certain type of societal development which could be described overall as an 'authoritarian modernization' in which the development of political democracy is suspended as the price for fast economic growth. In spite of certain political ruptures, in which the grouping of the state elite was suddenly replaced by a new political actor, the power holders in

the state maintained political authoritarianism in which democratic actors were suppressed for nearly 40 years. At the same time, they prevented the major economic actor, the bourgeois class, from taking an independent stance for their own economic interests against the state. The economic development of South Korea was not the product of the combined efforts between political actors in general and the state in particular, on the one hand, and economic actors, on the other, according to a Parsonian idea of required coordination over boundaries for an economic programme for modern society (Parsons and Smelser, 1956). Certainly, the (power) relationship between them was hardly equal under authoritarian modernization. In a sense, the Korean case of economic modernization could be interpreted as a successful example of the political control of the economic sphere, if economic performance were the only object of evaluation for modernization in developing countries where freedom of economic activities remains barely institutionalized.

If one intends to deal with the Korean case under a sociological perspective, analyzing the possible correlation between political democracy and economic development, the Korean experience shows, quite regrettably, that the dual development in politics and the economy is not achieved simultaneously, but occurred sequentially: democracy followed economic development. At the same time, the evaluation of capitalist development for the generation of democratic actors (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992) should supplement, from the Korean experience, the importance of the historical and non-economic element through which (industrial) workers become democratic actors, and the possible de-radicalization of democratic actors in the process of capitalist economic development influenced by non-economic factors: above all, a political suppression, highly implicated in capitalist economic development. The political process in which counter-state actors increase their political capacity for

democratization in the Korean context shows that democratic actors have been merely reacting against the authoritarian state. Secondly, it shows the fragmentation of counter-state democratic actors in a newly emerging political theatre with a certain level of institutionalized procedural democracy - this issue will be dealt with in the next chapter.

One of the problems for the theory of democracy within the broad framework of modernization theory, is its overloading of the importance of institutional development of the (democratic) political system leading to overall societal transformation. While it is certainly true that the institutionalization of political affairs and the reorganization of political activities within the institutional framework are one of the crucial elements influencing political actors towards democracy, one of the neglected factors, or rather deliberately avoided factors, is the problem of the political actors who should take the role of the instituting agency. For example, if underdeveloped institutions and the political system in general are mentioned as the main cause of South Korean authoritarianism, then this fundamentally misrepresents Korean politics. Unevenly distributed political power since the emergence of the state, rather inescapably suggests the need to look at the previous political profile. In fact, political disputes among several actors could be regarded as substantial causes for the undemocratic embodiment of political institutions. Furthermore, the state authority itself has been the source of power for dealing with the utility of state institutions and the overall political system, with the purpose of securing for the state elite its own political status in the state. The political relationship between the state and counter-state actors began to change, not as the result of the gradual implantation of democratic institutions, but through the political experiences built on long-term political conflicts, in which particular institutional alternatives become focused and favored.

## 6. *After* authoritarian modernization: modernity and uncertainty

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I described how the state and counter-state actors increased their powers against the other, having previously depended on the problematic relationship between them. Whereas the previous political situation had been shaped in the bi-polar tension between state and counter-state actors, the new situation after 1987 shows how this rigid political structure is gradually changing. It seems fair to say that institutional democracy had been achieved, to some extent, since 1987, encouraging political actors to freely present their own alternative programmes for reform (see, West and Baker, 1991 for constitutional reforms). Further, the institutionalization of socio-economic systems in complementarity to economic growth began to enable actors to communicate with others in a more widely-rationalized manner than before. However, major socio-political actors immediately exposed their lacking abilities which did not make them well-suited to this changed situation. Parliamentary politics, for example, on the whole, has continued with unqualified political discourse that, ignoring more systematic implications for policy agendas, mainly focuses on the problematic aspects of politicians from other parties. At the same time, one of the major economic contributors, the *Chaebols*, have failed to enjoy a more liberalized economic atmosphere, since the collapse of the military dictatorship, that would help economic growth. Why are they thus deadlocked?

As I mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, the most crucial element of modernity is the actors' creative abilities to explicate and work with the

values which are embedded in their basic orientations. The problem most Korean political actors face, then, is the inability to remold values, which have been maintained from the previous political era, for the new situation, or the lack of awareness of the need for a radical reconstruction of new political agendas. Broadly speaking, the current South Korean situation since 1987 could be understood as a new crisis of modernity in the Korean context. The current crisis is neither a crisis of regime, nor of the state that has distinctively shaped current Korean society. Nor is the crisis exclusively limited to the economic sphere - the devastating financial crisis of 1997 - or to the cultural sphere - a rapid social transformation provoking a new type of value orientation. The current crisis has indeed something problematic for each sphere, in which critical problems unfurl. However, it is quite different from the critical situations in the previous modernization period, in that whereas those were mainly shaped by asymmetric power relations between major actors - state actors as dominant and counter-state actors as resistant -, the current critical situation has been caused by the exhaustion of those actors' practical capacities in the newly emergent political theatre of interplay between them.

## **6.1. The unveiled vulnerability of the Korean path to modernization**

### ***6.1.1. Doubts on democratic actors in politics***

Most of all, the state began to lose its power over society, if the conceptual dichotomy is assumed, through the changes of the state elite after 1987. As I have pointed out in chapters 3, 4 and 5, the nature of the power structure in Korean politics in the twentieth century was formed through an asymmetric relation between major political actors, which, after a number of political ruptures produced sudden changes of dominant power relations in the state. While the group of political actors in the state could

be broadly understood as the state elite, the emergence of new power holders as the new state elite and the decline of the previous state elite occurred through political ruptures. Under the particular political context in which the institutionalization of political activities, in terms of implanting procedural democracy, has been considerably limited, and because of a certain lack of possibility for political actors in the state to change, the regime changes have become possible only through political forces beyond parliamentary politics. Besides, constitutional reforms have been followed by political ruptures. In spite of its short existence, South Korean politics has shown that different types of political actors have taken the state, whereas North Korean politics has remained stable with the hegemonic power of the political group whose members made their careers in the independence movements of the colonial period and in the Korean war later. The rise of the military elite as the power-holders of the South Korean state in the 1960s and their decline in the 1980s, for example, should be interpreted as one example of the changes of the state elite. The elite based in the military is replaced at the beginning of the 1990s by professional politicians, in the narrow sense, who had been active in Parliament since the 1960s as critics of the authoritarian regimes. The rise of a non-military political class coincides with the decline of the authoritarian state and a redefining process of the functions of administrative branches and of the autonomy of the economic classes.

The authoritarian state based on the political elite with military backgrounds had its dominant political power curtailed at the end of the 1980s. Through the period of dictatorship in the 1980s, the political capacity of democrats, students, workers, farmers and the urban poor significantly increased, and they much more vigorously resisted the state's harsh political suppression

than their predecessors had done in the 1960s and 1970s. They endlessly challenged state authority, which suffered from a lack of political legitimacy due to the problematic origin of the state by military coup. In 1987, they finally achieved the state's abandonment of its design to change the constitution, that would have extended the presidency of the state, which consequently meant a direct voting system for electing the new president would have been practiced. Nonetheless, however, the results of the presidential election in December 1987 was not a resounding victory for counter-state actors. A former army general, who was deeply involved in the military coup of 1979, was elected as the new president, while regionalism emerged as a powerful political instrument during the campaign. The new president had deep connections with the former regime and consequently most of the state-elite remained. In spite of the continuation of problematic regimes, the political experience of 1987 was very significant, enough to be dubbed a turning-point for political development. Political discourse in the public sphere, for example, developed openly, and many issues, which had previously been ignored or neglected, received attention, even though the extension of political discourse did not produce an instant reform of political culture.

Once the regime change was institutionalized, followed by the presidential election with the direct voting system, the political elite in the state could not treat workers' trade-union activities, farmers' protests, students' movement for the (re)unification of Korea with the harsh suppression that had hitherto been the norm. The new regime (1988-1992) had to show, at the very least, democratic gestures that differentiated it from previous military regimes, as the first legitimated government that was thereby also subject to political pressure from opposition parties that constituted a

majority in the Parliament (LEE Su-Hoon, 1993). Henceforth, comparison between previous military regimes and new civilian governments has become a powerful tool for evaluating any new government's overall political activities, and a means through which authoritarian modernization has been subject to reevaluation. The major state elite as power-holders has significantly changed thrice since the presidency election of 1987: the military which took power from 1961 to 1987 was eradicated from politics under the civilian government; in spite of strong political reform policies, however, the first civilian government (1993-1997) was unable to stimulate economic growth and was severely criticized for the financial crisis of 1997; the KIM Dae-Jung government (1998-2002), which began its tenure facing a dire economic situation, has faced wide criticism, not only from political conservatives, but also from beneficiaries of the preceding economic growth, for restructuring programmes for the economy and its 'sunshine' policy toward North Korea.

With the emergence of the KIM Dae-Jung government and its 5 years' activities, however, a political transformation resulting from certain changes in the overall role of the state for societal development occurred. This means that the binary distinction between the state and counter-state actors, as evidenced in the authoritarian period, no longer holds, in an era in which the latter have assumed state authority. A further implication in the Korean context, is that the political elite were no longer able to instrumentalize state authority for justifying their illegitimate practices, because of the fragmentation of the symbolic power of the state. In addition, the rigid binary code of ideological tension also begins to dissolve. While the contents of political discourse in the public sphere, which had been stifled in the previous period, has begun to include a wide



range of socio-political and economic issues, the political spectrum for pursuing alternatives has also widened. Counter-state political actors who had increased their influence in the conflictive political process also revealed their lack of preparation for dealing with issues in the new context: the solidarity of counter-state actors began to fragment. Most of all, reform-oriented conservative politicians, who had been regarded as democrats, betrayed their own political interests as the political class intent on gaining positions in the state. For example, two leading politicians, who later became presidents of the state in turn, competed with each other, provoking issues of regional identity in the presidential election, and others participated in their respective election camps - this phenomenon might be understood as 'caciquism' in Korean politics.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the different political orientations of social movement groups and students' organizations, which had been rather marginalized in favor of solidarity against the authoritarian state, became clearly visible after the presidential election of

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1) Although Sapelli (1995)'s categorical container, Southern Europe, could not fully arrive at the generalized socio-political description for all the five countries in his research - Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece and Turkey -, his description of the political phenomenon, that party politics is shaped under the power of 'bosses' and their networks at the local level, could find an equivalent form in Korean politics. While the overall comparison between South Korean politics and any example in his research must include the transformative processes of those societies and the states since the 1990s, particular types of the institutional development of politics under the influences of personal relationships, including the hierarchical order in many countries in Europe, Asia and South America is deserving further investigation, rather than being treated simply as deviations of modern institutions or underdeveloped institutional activities in those societies.

1987. The initial setting for the Korean discourse on civil society illustrates one of the dilemmas of the recent political transformation: to reconfigure solidarity among democratic actors under the condition of the political fragmentation of the class movement and the civic movement (SOHN Hyeok-Jae et al., 1999; KIM Seung-Kuk, 1998; KIM Sunhyuk, 1997; KIM Se-Kyun, 1995).

The democratization process of Korean politics has been highlighted in several debates in the social and political sciences. Four exemplary debates are as follows: firstly, on the constitutional force of democracy and the role of the middle class and working class, which occurs in the discourse on the relationship between economic development and political democracy; secondly, on the limited nature of institutional democracy and the emergence of interest-based political disputes; thirdly, on what is called, the Asian values and Korean exceptionalism in terms of political culture in the Asian region as a whole; fourthly, on the particularity of Korean politics, in terms of popular political agendas and rigid political actors, under which many Korean scholars doubt the applicability of political theories from Non-Korean experiences.

While many scholars in Korean studies commonly accept the significant contribution of the middle class to the democratic movement in June 1987, Hagen KOO (1999) refutes this, arguing that most citizens who participated in demonstrations on the street were white-collar workers, symbolized as 'the neck-tie squads' and supporters on the street, rather than members of the assumed category, the middle class. Also, HAN Sang-Jin (1997, 1995) doubts the active capacity of the middle class for advancing democracy and proposes another social category, the 'middling grass roots' as the main

motor for democracy in South Korea. The debate is partly based on different interpretations of the actualization of the working class movement. In several discourses, it is said that a number of participants in the political movement are individual citizens rather than being conceptualized as workers. In fact, the category of the working class in many political discourses was narrowly defined so as to indicate 'blue-collar' workers on the shop floor, rather than broadly identifying the members within the relations of production in the capitalist economy. Furthermore, a significantly increased organization of trade unions was empirically argued as the phenomenon which followed the political movement in June 1987 as the consequence of victory. While many scholars observe that workers' movements in their economic struggles temporally followed the political movement for constitutional change against the authoritarian state, they have marginalized the role of the working class for democratization, through the separation of collective movements in the economic and the political spheres.

The categorization of collective movements into 'political' and 'economic' struggles for explaining the dynamic politics in the 1980s and 1990s does not seem to be in accord with the transformative process of Korean politics. If we recall the particular relationship of the political and the economic under the authoritarian style of modernization, the workers movement of the 1970s and the 1980s could be better understood if it is regarded as the human rights movement for achieving minimum standards for workers as human beings and further civic movements for equal civic rights at least guaranteed by the constitution of the state. Ironically, the long lasting and notorious tradition of the state's intervention in labor disputes since the colonial period has induced, not the conceptual

distinction between the economic and the political, but the distinction between the democratic and the authoritarian, around which bi-polarized politics, on the one hand, and the asymmetric power balance between political and economic actors, on the other, have formed. Just as the state had taken a part in economic relations, so the workers movements in the 1970s and 1980s - even though they normally occurred within individual companies and mainly concerned themselves with economic agendas and related institutional issues - had already entered the political sphere where they confronted the authoritarian state. For this reason, the typological separation between the political movement and the economic movement around 1987 should be carefully modified, not for investigating the actual process of political struggle for constitutional change, but for analyzing how the boundary distinction between the political and the economic began to be more sharply implemented in order to allow for further development in political and economic issues. The great labor struggles from July to September in 1987, and those that followed the workers movement in the early 1990s, began to have a more clearly defined economic meaning, while the organizational activities outside the economic sphere remain restricted when diverse types of social movements have extensively engaged with political agendas. The less the state intervenes in economic disputes and the more labor issues are treated with the institutional methods, the more does separation of the economic and political movement become apparent. Of course, this should not be understood as a natural process of differentiation, firstly because the Korean state still has enough political power to minimize the politicization of trade-union activities, and secondly because Korean politics in the 1990s was highly influenced by ideological conflict in which anti-communism and anti-North-Koreanism were used to suppress the workers movement. Further, the collective self-consciousness of

the working class has been barely realized in dealing with political agendas, the parliamentary and presidential elections, for example, whereas other forms of social ties - regional identity, for example - emerged as powerful determinants for judging governmental and parliamentary activities. Many workers have voted for candidates other than the leaders of trade unions and political activists, both in presidential elections and in the general elections for selecting members of Parliament.

Whereas the significance of the working class as democratic actors beyond purely economic interests might therefore be doubted, some scholars see the development of the South Korean workers movement in the 1980s and 1990s as a rather distinctive phenomenon which is unlikely to be detected in any other countries in East Asia. At the same time, the democratization process as a whole has been contrasted with situations in other Asian countries. Thornton (1998) grapples with the different ideas on democracy in the East Asian context, comparing two leaders in Singapore and South Korea. While the former prime minister of Singapore, LEE Kwan-You, rejects the compatibility of Western individualist democracy with Asian culture, KIM Dae-Jung refutes Lee's argument, pointing out that the idea of democracy has precursors in the Korean political tradition and, moreover, is necessary for contemporary politics. Thornton submits that the democratization of South Korea is the exceptional case in the East Asian Context.

If democratization mainly relates to the institutional aspect, then South Korea has significantly realized it since 1987. The Constitutional Court was reintroduced in order to evaluate the activities of the state in accordance with the constitution. The direct voting system for selecting the president is

working well without state-elite interference. The major state institutions and apparatuses, which were politically influenced by the dominant power groups in the state, began to neutralize this impact. A number of non-governmental organizations are extending their activities enough to influence state policies, and trade-union activities have been acknowledged as a part of the political and economic landscape. In spite of these developments, however, Korean politics still has non-institutional problems which cannot be easily dealt with by institutional reform. First of all, politics has hardly shifted towards a rational structure with advanced policy discourse, as was expected from the democratic era. Rather, it is shaped by a 'regional egoism' under the influence of provocative conservative politicians. Regionalism, which surfaced and developed in politics after the 1970s, becomes the decisive element, not only in elections, but also in political debates between politicians in Parliament. It also becomes the background to the corruption in personnel affairs in the state (HWANG Jong-Sung, 1997; YEA, 1994). A rigid old school-tie mentality in the higher education system is also noticeable. While many scholars praised Koreans' high interest in education, as a constitutive element for fast economic growth, a swollen interest in graduating from a few prestigious universities has produced serious competition between those universities and excluded others simultaneously. Familism emerges as one of the serious issues in politics as well. Many big conglomerates have been managed by members of the owners' family, rather than by experts in the industrial fields, for example. These problems normally have cross-boundary effects through multiple relations between diverse political and socio-economic positions. While most scholars criticize these problems in terms of peoples' underdeveloped attitudes to democracy, a few scholars argue that these socio-political phenomena show that the western idea of individualist

democracy is inadequate for Koreans, who still act according to traditional values (LEW and CHANG, 1998).

The rapid social transformation effected by economic modernization has led many Korean scholars to develop criticisms of the consequences of economy-centered modernization. Some focus on the practical problems of the economic model and the role of the state for class relations, others have asked more fundamental questions concerning the applicability of the western model of development and democracy for the Korean context. The latter criticize not only the developmentalist view for the transformation of Korea, but also the critics of developmentalism. While the majority of intellectual debates have been produced by the developmentalists and their Marxian critics, the third position criticizes both of them as universalistic and based on Western experiences that ignore the particularity of the Korean situation, as well as disregarding many explanatory paradigms in the social sciences. From neo-conservative theorists under Confucian paradigms, to Buddhist perspectives to critical social thinkers, the spectrum of perspectives that occupy this position is rather diverse.<sup>2</sup> One of the significant phenomena in the Korean social sciences in the 1990s is that many social scientists begin to deal with the traditional intellectual paradigms under the broad framework of the social sciences.<sup>3</sup> This is more

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2) For example, see the group of scholars for the journal, *Tradition and Modernity*.

3) This observation should be more carefully understood in the awareness of the particularly shaped academic environment in Korea. While so-called 'Korean studies' as part of regional studies has been broadly understood as studies on Korea, as a whole, in international academies and their Korean counterparts, 'Korean studies' as an academic discipline has been hardly

than the rediscovery of traditional thought, but rather, is part of a process that has been ongoing since the early twentieth century. The interpretation of traditional intellectual thought under the social scientific vocabulary of the current period, opens a possibility for intellectual reconciliation, between what has been rapidly imported since the late nineteenth century with what prevailed before then. Radical doubts on conventional views and methods, however, have not produced clearly alternative paradigms, although the problems of many political theories of democracy have become discernible.

These diverse interpretations of the current political situation indubitably reflect its uncertainties. In spite of the remarkable achievement of democracy, compared to the previous modernization period, the expectations for further developments seem to have been unsatisfactorily realized. The recognition of this situation as crisis is not merely the acknowledgment of wide-spread disagreement and disappointment. Rather it is the serious understanding of this situation as a de-vitalized moment in which there is no hegemonic actor equipped with powerful alternatives and the absence of

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established within the university system. For this reason, some of the social scientific disciplines, commonly classified as the modern academic field, economics, political science, sociology, for example, have dealt with Korean cases within their own disciplinary traditions. Many debates on Korean experiences in the narrowly defined 'Korean social science' concern the necessity for a more relevant methodology and reinterpretation of traditional thought and their actualization in the historical context in which creative theoretical works beyond a sort of simple adaptation of western thought have been more often published since the 1990s. At the very least, there is an increased publication of such thematic work by major academic associations.



political actors able to persuade others, or capable of leading them to participate in the dynamic relation. Even though a number of policies have been proposed according to conventional ideas and under newly developed views, this has not been the parturition for a new politics. Although one might accept this situation as inescapable in any transitional process, rather than defining it as a crisis, the Korean situation shows that the actors in this de-vitalized moment reveal their own inability to deal with the impact of external influences. It was under the financial crisis and the pressure of economic restructuring that power relations between political actors were again considerably reshaped and changed.

#### ***6.1.2. Breakdown of the economy, its consequence and new possibility***

The economic turmoil that accompanied the severe financial crisis of 1997 becomes a decisive element in the transformation of the Korean economy. The South Korean state was forced to follow the strictures of the International Monetary Fund (henceforth IMF) for the economic restructuring of the Korean economy, in order to be eligible for financial aid to rescue the liquidity of the Korean currency. Whereas 1997 started with a workers' national strike against new labor law legislation, designed to increase flexibility in employment, the year ended with gloomy expectations of massive unemployment in the Korean economy for the first time since the developmental period. The *Chaebol* - the big conglomerates - system, which had stood at the forefront of an expanding Korean economy and was one of the two economic models, together with the developmental state, was deconstructed in the new economic restructuring process, so as to tackle the high debt problem. The financial sector, which was accused as the main instigator of the currency crisis, has also come under serious pressure to increase transparency in the flow of capital. All

in all, these changes are normally understood as inescapable remedies for recovery towards healthy market economy.

Changes in the economic sphere have remarkable repercussions in the political sphere. It was in an economic crisis that the dissident politician, KIM Dae-Jung, was elected the president of the state. It was the first fully successful event for opposition parties in Korean politics. The policy guideline for the state, which should precede the IMF's economic reform, was known as the reformatory programmes of 'the Washington consensus' (see, Williamson, 1994, 1993; Aziz and Wescott, 1997). This became a source of a conspiracy theory about international capital's onslaught on national sovereignty.<sup>4</sup> However, the Kim government, to some extent succeeded in minimizing the objection of the working class to the introduction of neo-liberalist principles for the Korean economy. The representatives of trade unions accepted the current situation as the crisis of working conditions as well as that of Korean capital and generally acquiesced in the state's economic reform. While trade-union activities have

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4) While the correlation between economic reforms and the political process is quite persuasive, the understanding of the Washington Consensus in the Korean context has particularly focused on its emphasis on crises as a fecund soil for economic liberalization, supposedly implanted by the new government following the IMF's rescue programmes for the Korean economy.

'It has often been suggested that policy reforms emerge in response to crisis. Crises have the effect of shocking countries out of traditional policy patterns, disorganizing the interest groups that typically veto policy reform, and generating pressure for politicians to change policies that can be seen to have failed. ... Crisis is clearly neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to initiate reform. It has nevertheless often played a critical role in stimulating reform.'  
(Williamson, 1994: 562-565)

become significantly more institutionalized as part of economic activity, they have also lost their character of strong militancy against the state and capital. Despair of the current economic situation and disappointments for the new political situation of the 1990s are reflected in what is called 'PARK Jung-Hee' syndrome, which positively reevaluates the period of developmental dictatorship. In spite of the fact that it was provoked by the conservative newspapers and politicians and its consanguinity to a regional egoism, the diffusion of the Park syndrome is enough to cynicize the current political situation in which political actors are unable to motivate peoples' political participation.

The so-called neo-liberalist way has been the central occupation of many debates in Korean studies since 1997. In several policy discourses it is assumed as given, as the way for the Korean economy to proceed. This is not only because the Korean model of economic development exposes its powerlessness and fragility in the 1990s, but also because there is not yet a clear alternative to the 'Anglo-American' model of economic growth, the neo-liberal economy, that gives priority to the increased competitiveness of private companies, in the world economy. Ironically, however, the economic restructuring process according to the neo-liberalist path, in Korea, still demands strong intervention of the state in the market. As the trainer it still gives orders to individual companies that exist in the new economic situation beyond state control, and as the promoter, it encourages newcomers to participate in newly emerging industrial sectors including information and bio-technology. Especially for the reform of the financial sector, the role of the state is very significant. While common observers criticize the Korean economy as 'crony capitalism', with the state as morally accountable for the currency crisis of 1997, some political

economists explain its causes differently. CHANG Ha-Joon (1998a, 1998b) points to rapid deregulation of the financial sector as the main cause of crisis. While the previous governments had strictly controlled the flow of international money, which had the effect of regulating *chaebols* as well, the KIM Young-Sam government abolished many regulations in the financial sector, so that *chaebols* precipitately increased short-term loans in order to expand with the help of huge new investments, and this eventually caused the currency crisis. Matthews (1998) argues that the current government has proceeded with economic restructuring programmes in a dual way: increasing the standard of economic activities to an international level, under IMF monitoring; and the reformulation of industrial policies, debated in previous governments, for establishing a proper institutional role for the economy, although the state's authoritarian interventions in economic reform are still observable (MO and MOON, 1999; Cumings, 1998).

At the same time, the internationalization of the Korean economy by means of the massive inflow of foreign capital and foreign ownership, has provoked a debate on nationalism in the economic sphere. Workers have been particularly worried about the take-over of their companies by foreign interests. For the workers equated new ownership with massive lay-offs, that may well be facilitated through the introduction of 'labor flexibility' legislation, such as had been successfully resisted by the nation-wide workers movement in January 1997, before the economic crisis occurred (see, SEONG Kyoung-Ryung, 1998; JUNG Young-Tae, 2000 for the analysis of the labor movement against neo-liberalism in Korea). In fact, many foreign capitals, acting as dominant share-holders, have demanded the right to decide whether to lay-off of workers, while in many mergers between Korean companies, workers received a guarantee of continuous

employment. Many Koreans understood that the gap between employment-related company policies derived from different organizational cultures. In the situation in which a large proportion of national wealth was lost through the currency crisis and the collapse of the stock index, that provoked strong hostility from the international investment funds, the issue of continuous employment under foreign ownership, incited powerful nationalist reactions in the workers' movement. The line of tension that was drawn, between Korean workers and foreign capital in the economic crisis, negatively affects workers' attitudes to the KIM Dae-Jung government, which has to encourage foreign investment. The dilemma of the government came from the contradiction between its political foundation - as reform-oriented democrats with political support from the lower middle class and the underclasses - and its economic role - narrowly set within economic restructuring programmes guided by the IMF under the financial crisis.<sup>5</sup>

## **6.2. The research dilemmas in the transitional period**

### **6.2.1. *The places of Korean experiences in the social sciences***

When the actual processes of political and economic transformation in South Korea have been widely reflected in the scholarly debates, it seems necessary to gain an overview of the overall direction of social scientific

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5) While the investigation of the overall roles of the IMF for the global scale of financial monitoring is not dealt with in this chapter, it seems better to view the Korean crisis within the overall economic discourse on the crisis of capitalism and its self-regulatory mechanism sustained by financial capital. For a basic understanding of the international monetary system and its organizational form within financial capitalism, see Aglietta (2000, 1996, 1994, 1993, 1979).

research in Korean studies. This is because the critical situation of South Korean politics also includes an intellectual crisis. When many socio-political actors lack any further dynamics for extending democratic influences and when they are further exposed to fragmentation by the power of agency, many social scientists find great difficulty in interpreting the actual processes of societal transformation, failing to respond intellectually with plausible answers. For instance, the great debate on the social formation of South Korea in the 1980s, which none of the social scientists could have avoided engaging in, or commenting on, was not further developed to provide an overall, long-term perspective on modernity in the Korean context. Even though the post-Marxism, post-modernity, and civil society debates, for example, have followed the social-formation debates, there remains a reluctance to accept that the consequences of intellectual debates are mirrored in the political projects of the 1990s.

One could, of course, produce different diagnoses for the overall path of the Korean social sciences. Initially, the social-formation debate brought to light many social scientists' limited understanding of some methodological issues; the relationship between 'universalism' and 'particularism', 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity', 'center' and 'periphery' in power relations, for example, the problems with which tended to largely disappear in the debates that followed. At the same time, the totalizing character of academic discourse on political issues could be charged as problematic. Alternatively, one might argue that these debates clearly show how the Korean social sciences, especially the intellectual works in the critical tradition, remained underdeveloped under the political dictatorship of the authoritarian state, indicating the fact that, more or less, there existed problematic aspects in the theorization process among major protagonists' writings. Further, and

paradoxically, one could view rapid societal transformation as the background of current academic and intellectual reality, in which grand-scale debate is neither possible, due to the fact that the bi-polarized setting of the political structure has been gradually destroyed, nor desirable any longer, in the sense that any strong proposal for reshaping Korean society as a whole would again provoke the totalitarian side-effect of organized modernity, the restriction of individuals' freedom under rigid collective goals.

While any comment on the current intellectual situation has its own rationale, which cannot be ignored in any theoretical perspective, I would like to additionally point out an extra dimension of Korean studies in the social sciences, through which current research dilemmas can be more easily identified. Whether or not Korean studies has two different research angles and focal points based on particularly shaped 'internationalized scholarly flavors', on the one hand, and 'national ones'<sup>6</sup>, on the other, a common characteristic appears for both the nationalist and the internationalist perspective: this maps the Korean experience as one side of the binary distinction in comparison-oriented ideas between 'we' and 'they', 'developed' and 'underdeveloped', 'successful' and 'badly-performed', 'advanced' and 'following', 'teaching' and 'learning', 'already-established' and

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6) It seems rather difficult to find any writing exclusively deal with this issue in the social sciences, while many proposals for the future of Korean social science have been raised. However, available are some writings in humanities, cultural studies and education. See, Underwood (1998), CHO Hung-youn et al. (1996), Keith (1994) Sasse (1996), KIM Chong-Suh (1994).

'required to be implanted', and so forth. For example, while the majority of economic discourses in Korean studies have been occupied with producing some sort of response to the authoritarian style of modernization, a number of other works have implicitly assumed or explicitly argued that the Korean situation is completely different from other countries, where economic and socio-political processes receive scholarly attention. Whether or not the intellectual development is classified as modernization theory, economic institutionalism, developmental statism, or as the broad spectrum of Marxian criticism of them, the ways of theorizing the Korean experience are hardly sustainable outside of the binary codification of capitalism. Especially in the case of regional studies, Korean studies has been deeply shaped by the universalistic idea of modernization, in which Korea seems to be regarded as the object which needs the implantation of universalist principles guaranteeing superior economic performance, the apotheosis of which is supposedly found in the USA, some European countries and Japan. Even in publications that collectively evaluate several states, South Korea has often been taken as an illustration of the need to reappraise the universal program of economic modernization to promote 'developing countries' to the higher level.

What is the problem with the conceptually-divided comparative research perspective? One might continue to be puzzled by the summary above. In order to identify the problem of economic research that is undermined by the conceptually-separated categorical understanding of comparative studies, it seems necessary to better identify how some economic discourses pertaining to European capitalism and 'developing capitalism' of the South Korea 'type', have been shaped in the social sciences. It is well-known that many scholars in European studies have tried to suggest alternatives to



Americanized economic liberalism, in order to secure a welfare state tradition that could not be separately understood from the overall socio-historical processes of these societies. If there is at least one commonality across different scholarly perspectives based broadly on separate academic disciplines; sociology, political economy, economics, for example, or wider national academic environments; France, Germany, the UK, for example, it would be the importance of being aware of the existence of particularly shaped historical and political contexts, in which the introduction of liberalist principles for economics provokes high socio-political costs, that cannot be traded against the economic performance that these countries have experienced since the 1960s. The tradition of the institutionalist critique of economic liberalism in economic sociology, for example, clearly shows how the idea of multiply-structured capitalism in a socio-historical specificity has been introduced as an important argument for the inadequacy of economy-driven social change, while, at the same time, the rise of the Japanese economy has been invoked in terms of a culturalist response for the economic logic behind American influence. Needless to say, these two alternative theorizing styles have influenced the view on the existence of multiple capitalism for economic discourse in general and have suggested diverse policy implications for each national or regional economy (Crouch and Streeck, 1997; Storper and Salais, 1997; Hall and Soskice, 2001, for example).<sup>7</sup>

7) Although not investigated for the purpose of the thesis, it must be noted that there are quite different theoretical approaches among institutionalist tendencies. Such differences become highly visible when sociological issues, such as 'structuralism', 'social actions', 'contextualism', 'analytical perspectivism', for example, become objects of evaluation.

Development studies, however, has been influenced by rather different research interests than those governing economic discourses. Above all, many national economies classified as 'developing', have insisted that political modernity has not been properly addressed. Whereas many works on 'advanced industrial countries' have more or less assumed the political status quo of those countries as the socio-political environment for different economic activities, their counterparts in development studies have pointed to the political situation in a country as the critical aspect of any 'underdeveloped economy'. For them, political modernization is the key issue of economic modernization. Even though, in some well-performing national cases, strong political leadership, the interventionist state and even limited democratic freedom have been mentioned as particular aspects of 'Non-European', 'Non-American' economies, the issue of political reform for economic growth under conditions of economic fluctuation related to the international financial situation, is highly focused. However, ironically, the analyses of the direction of economic restructuring processes normally accept the neo-liberalist principles for the economy. While policy-makers and policy-oriented scholars have to deal with the imposition of the North-American economic model, critical actors are in many instances shaped by the nationalistic idea of culture against economic globalization and its cultural consequences (Jameson and Miyoshi, 1998), and this strong anti-conformist attitude quite often provokes a political clash between state and society in developing countries. One problem among others in introducing the liberalist economic model and related institutional changes, is that the universal principles of socio-economic modernization very easily provoke political instability as their side-effect, even though this is unintended by the social scientists and policy-makers promoting universal

modernization.

Korean studies of authoritarian modernization, in which the Korean economy has been commonly symbolized as one of the successful cases of a strong interventionist state in economic policies, have focused on the problems of strong political leadership and its socio-political consequences. Many intellectual works have further argued the necessity of the institutionalization of democratic rules, which should not be sacrificed to economic growth. However, it is rather difficult to find a research orientation able to identify the relationship between political stability without dictatorship and economic development, on the one hand, and the double process of the actualization of economic development and political democracy, on the other hand. One could pragmatically argue that the lack of discourse on the varieties of capitalism in Korean studies is simply because neither development, political or economic, has been significantly achieved to provide enough material for a case study. While this is certainly true, questions, concerning the reliability of liberal economic principles for promoting further economic development in the Korean situation and whether it would encourage political development, and further, whether the political democratization process, if it is independently achievable from the influence of the economy, could accelerate economic liberalism better than any possible alternative, remain crucial.

Ironically, modernization theory and current neo-liberal economic principles suppose a serious contradiction between economic development and political democratization, that itself has political implications. When many recent economic writings concentrate on the socio-political conditions for promoting the economy, politics itself is implicitly assumed as a method,

or useful tool, rather than as an achievable goal. Accordingly, what many policy scientists on economic development prioritize, is not democratic politics, but a politics that is economy-friendly. The view has a naturalistic foundation; democracy arises from economic development, a view that is quite often found in comparative sociological inquiries that investigate the correlation between economic development and political democracy in different national settings. More carefully motivated research questions of how newly developed rationalized value systems, following economic transformation, could positively contribute to democratization and which social group would conceivably have more political initiative for the institutionalization of democratic politics, are commonly found. One could, of course, criticize my stance, asking what the problem of sequencing politics after the economy is, if it is a practically achievable scenario in any case. The Korean experience under the past authoritarian experience and the current transformative period, however, regrettably show this to be an unrealistic expectation.

If any answer to these questions needs to be found in an available empirical case, under the accepted binary codification of categories, there seems more than one exemplary case in the 'advanced industrial economies'. However, in relation to the applicability of existing models, none of the exemplars could be fully mobilized for Korean studies, other than to illustrate that an abstract ultimate principle, like the neo-liberal economic one, will always be undermined. What the actual research on varieties of capitalism, including the US, teaches us, is that economic boundaries need careful coordination of institutional and human resources, and that these reliable socio-economic resources have been established each in their own historical situation.

### ***6.2.2. The horizon of Korean politics: between universal principles and cultural-historical settings***

Whereas, in the process of highly organized economic modernization, the state and policy-oriented scholars have widely assumed that the modernization of the national economy would be achieved when advanced knowledge and experiences from developed countries are carefully studied and well-adopted, the political requirements for accomplishing the economic task have been highly ignored. I indicated, in chapter 4 and 5, that one of the reasons for the belated development of democracy derived from the weak political legitimacy of newly emergent authoritarian regimes, with the result that democratization was sacrificed in the name of modernization and national security. Under this political condition, Korean studies produced many critical works on Korean politics, under three main strands: firstly, arguing the importance of the rule of law; secondly, criticizing some problematic laws; thirdly, suggesting alternative politics for the Korean situation.

The first orientation has concentrated on the abuse of power by the political elite and the governmental control of political institutions. In fact, the workers movement of the 1970s and 1980s very often highlighted the problem of workers rights that were enshrined in law and largely ignored by the state and individual companies. At the same time, human rights issues quite often came to the fore because, although they were guaranteed in the Constitution, they were hardly respected by the state in real politics. In the recent political transformation of the 1990s, the problem of an unbalanced agential power beyond the legal framework, as evidenced by the state and the state elite, has been largely solved, thanks to the decrease of

state power and the consequences of the rise of socio-political movements.

Under the second orientation, the repeal of problematic laws militating against political democracy and human rights, has accelerated. However, at the current stage of Korean politics, in which many political interest groups have already been transformed into agents of party politics, this process quite often includes serious ideological disputes beyond the debate on any specific article of the legal system. At the same time, the relative novelty of party politics, and the continuing legacy of the authoritarian state and that is visible in the power of regional-egoism, also influences the repeal process and new legislation. Social scientific research on the issue concerning the reevaluation of problematic laws, has been bound to the advocacy of universal principles of freedom for political activities and the narrow interpretation of these in the Korean context. The authoritarian state and its political institutions rigidly applied the rule of law against socio-political movements in the name of national security, often suppressing democratic movements under the special law for national security, which was legislated by an anti-North Korean attitude of the state. Accordingly, the abolition of undemocratic laws has been an extremely difficult task, because in order to do so, the contradiction between the nominal advocacy of universal human rights and its limited implementation under the condition of the unstable national security by possible North Korean threat, has to be politically solved. In many political discourses the extremists in conservative political groups have argued that the national security law has to be continuously practiced until the security issue is practically solved. In other words, they explicitly understand that the future of democratic politics in South Korea is fully conditioned by the inter-state relationship between South and North Korea. Many political activists and critical social scientists

who advocate an advanced democracy for South Korea, are also aware of this narrowly constructed situation, in which the promulgation of the universal principle of human rights, is powerless to change the law.

Under the third orientation, the main motive for evaluating Korean politics is not the universal principles of democracy. Rather, it is the careful investigation of what has been made by the state and the state elite in the historical process. The main premise, which is to a significant extent secure from any severe political intervention from the state from a normative point of view, for this approach is that the current South Korean situation should be understood as part of the national history of Korea, including North Korea. Even though there seem to be several idealized understandings of the Korean nation, Korean history, and Korean identity, which cannot be ignored in theory construction, the grand framework itself, that roams beyond an exclusively set South Korean political agenda is remarkably illuminating of the problematic aspects of South Korean politics, including the authoritarian tradition of the state. Above all, the state as the powerful political authority and the political elite as power holders in the state, are often subjected to a moral critique for the weak nature of their political legitimation. Interestingly, the historically shaped nationalist attitude operates as the basis for this moral critique - I have described the origin of this political aspect in chapters 3, 4, and 5. At the same time, Confucianism-based moral codes form the basic standard for the monitoring of political leaders and from time to time they become more influential than the legal system in determining public opinions (CHANG Kyung-Sup, 1997a, 1997b; HAHM Chaibong, 1997).

The historical and cultural aspect of Korean politics has been well

documented in Korean studies, not only because Korean politics produces particular political agendas, but also because it provides a unique value-orientation for evaluating the economic and political agendas of modernization. In particular, the fact that economic-political actors, as the driving force of modernization, have been 'historically' shaped in the Korean context, means that any suggested programme for further economic and political modernization has to assess these agents accordingly. The neo-liberalistic idea of transforming the Korean economy with a view to the global level, so to speak, does not consider the particularity of local actors in economic programmes. These may still assume the implicit dichotomy between the rational and the irrational actor for socio-political and economic agendas, found in early modernization theory, in which local actors in the Korean context might be classified as the latter. In empirical observations, however, I have described how political transformation was initialized by the inter-dependent relationship between local actors, on the one hand, and the environmental pressure of political tensions, on the other, and how even rapid economic transformation occurred under this condition. In other words, the historical and cultural dimension of politics has a significant impact in the actual process of the current economic restructuring, and possibly functions as the main variable for the actualization of a neo-liberal economic structure in the Korean context.

Ironically, the grand project for the future of Korean society as a whole, in Korean studies, has its own dilemmas in seeking a compromise solution for universality and locality. First of all, historically speaking, the two universal projects of capitalism and socialism have been seriously implicated in local interests since they became prominent at the beginning of the twentieth century - described in chapters 3, 4. Besides, the two projects had



exclusively taken their own geographical boundaries in South Korea and North Korea, provoking local competition between them. Further, historical issues, which are quite uniquely established in the Korean context, have been deeply involved in the projects as socio-political resources. Many social scientists in the 1990s become sensitized to the fact that neither of the two projects could be fully accepted at the expense of total ignorance of the other, not because of any interim judgement of the impossibility of deeming either better than the other, but because of the recognition that the drive developing any further project would be exhausted in further competition. Once social scientists become detached from given prototypes for economic projects, they try to find extra-elements in the cultural sphere for a more careful modification of the projects. The overall discourse on Asian values, more specifically on Confucian capitalism for the South Korean economy, or Confucian socialism in North Korean politics, so to speak, could be understood as part of this academic trend. However, the reality in the second half of the 1990s shows that an alternative theorizing based on cultural knowledge is hardly sustainable in the changing international situation. At the broad level, the South Korean economy has been forced to change its overall organizational culture and human relationships as well as its industrial structure, while North Korean socialism has its very survival at stake, in terms of its state sovereignty.

## 7. On the (re)unification of Korea: modernity and new polity

### Introduction

The collapse of the Berlin wall accelerated the demise of the Cold war situation in international politics. Eventually, the (re)unification of Germany was realized and the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe became powerless and inclined to Western Europe. In North-East Asia, Russia and China, who had been friendly to North Korea for strategic reasons since 1945, began to initiate diplomatic relations with South Korea, which had shown both impressive economic growth and political transformation towards democratization, in 1990 and 1992. Other former-socialist countries in Europe also began to forge links with South Korea for economic reasons. The two Korean states, in this changed atmosphere, joined the United Nations and produced a statement promoting reconciliation between them in 1991 after several meetings. However, the peace process ended without further accomplishments in the 1990s: the expected summit meeting between the leaders of the two Korean states, aimed at thawing political and military hostility, was thwarted by the death of the North Korean leader, Kim Il-Sung and the rigid political situation in South Korea where his death was treated as critical for the maintenance of the stubborn North Korean attitude.

This chapter aims at interpreting the discourse on the inter-state relationship between South and North Korea, which could be symbolized as the (re)unification discourse in Korean studies. Through previous chapters, I have suggested that the political concept, nation-state, should be rather differently understood for the two-state system in contemporary Korean politics compared to Europe: the rise of the so-called modern state at the

expense of the fragmentation of the national polity into two states. Also, in order to correctly evaluate South Korean politics, I have argued that it is necessary to identify the overall political terrain shaped by the colonial experience, the division of Korea, the Korean war, and the adoption of two modernist projects by the South and the North. More seriously, in chapters 5 and 6, I have drawn attention to the obstacles for the democratization of South Korean politics, themselves deeply connected with the division of the states. In other words, South Korean politics is highly dependent on the agenda of the inter-state relationship between the two Korean states. Especially the current political situation since the 1990s - which can be understood as a transitional period toward the customization of democracy for peoples' everyday lives - might be shaken again by the rise of an authoritarian state under the impact of a possible clash between the two states. At the same time, through the (re)unification discourse, the creative capacity of Korean social science begins to be employed to deal with the particular historical setting of the Korean polity.

### **7.1. The reunification discourse**

#### ***7.1.1 Korea as a community: Nostalgia for the lost community and the role of romanticism in the unification movement***

The communication channel between the South and the North had been exclusively set at the state level. The South Korean state, under rigid anti-communist ideology, controlled the unification discourse, following a bold agenda in domestic politics. The state regarded many democratic movement groups as supporters of North Korean policies towards the South and so suppressed their democratic claims with the national security law. After the victory of democratic movements in 1987, however, the students' association for democratic change more extensively raised the issue of the

reunification of Korea. The extension of the public sphere that incorporated political voices from many more social classes, enabled the students' to organize the 'unification movement', demanding open communication with North Korea.<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, the unification movement was based on a romantic approach that has become eroded by an institutional approach since the reunification of Germany in 1991. In order to identify the rather narrow direction of the students' association unification movement, it is necessary to examine the actual boundary of politics in the 1980s. Firstly, the political relationship between the two states had ossified around the Olympic Games in 1988: South Korea was lauded by the international community, including socialist states, for its economic growth, while North Korea faced accusations of terrorism following the explosion of a South Korean airplane. Secondly, active political groups intended to tackle the legitimacy of the state with reference to its unification policy, in which they criticized the national security law, and the inactive response to reunification by the state. Thirdly, a wide spectrum of political orientations for democracy was becoming apparent by the late 1980s: from conservative reformist to radical anti-state actors. The romantic approach of the unification movement reemerged in this political context.

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1) The participation of a student in the international youth and student festival held in Pyongyang, North Korea in 1989 ignited public debate. First of all, she ignored the law that prohibited any private contact with North Koreans. Secondly, her itinerary was symbolic: Seoul-Berlin-Pyongyang- (the military division site in the de-militarized zone between the South and North) -Seoul. She was immediately sent to prison when she crossed the South Korean border.

The movement began neither with an institutional preparation for reconciliation nor with an interest-based proposition for economic prosperity after reunification. Rather, it was designed to remind the state of an urgent 'humanitarian issue'; that there were a number of divided families in the South and North who had not met their family members since the Korean war and even since the division of Korea in 1945. The long duration of divided families and their pains and *hans* (한恨)<sup>2</sup>, a cultural concept, at the

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2) Since the 1970s, more or less, Korean studies has discovered a cultural concept, *han* (한恨). In the face of many Koreans who suffer from adverse socio-political or personal conditions, theologians and psychologists in particular have identified that Koreans conclusively explain their psychological condition by means of the concept *han*. Personal and familial problems, even collective problems, are narrated by *han*, especially when the causes of these problems arises from outside of the individual. These scholars have found that *han* functions for Koreans not only as an interpretative method for the relationship between the external world and themselves, but also as a self-diagnostic tool for the identification of one's current psychological status as resulting from the unfair consequences of the world. The concept, *han*, has been translated in various ways: 'bitterness and anger', 'unfulfilled wish', 'unrequited resentments', 'long accumulated sorrow and regret over one's misfortune', and so forth. When its several aspects are investigated in social context, *han* has been regarded as something different from 'resentment' and 'melancholy', in that it cannot directly trigger one's anger towards its causes, and also because it contains powerful energy towards the external world. The concept *hanpuli* (한풀이) means literally releasing *han*. Defining *hanpuli* is, however, likewise difficult, not only because it is related to the understanding of *han*, but also because there are many ambivalent ways of releasing *han*. In the

present time provokes endlessly the desire for reunification of the nation (Jager, 1996). 'The questions raised of why I cannot meet my husband/wife, parents/children, and friends/relatives and of why I cannot go to the hometown in the North demanded the state to show the will to actively deal with the reunification issue' (p.13). Furthermore, the unification movement was to some extent itself the reflection on modern Korean history as a whole - negatively framed - readdressing the question of who should be responsible for the current division of Korea. Needless to say, supporters of the students' movement for reunification were more serious critics of the US and Japan than others.<sup>3</sup>

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Korean context, the ways of *hanpuli* include dance, music in shamanist symbolic ritualism, and direct revengeful actions. Many novelists, poets, and film directors, as well as academics, still debate the question of the most appropriate form of *hanpuli*. Sublimation in spirit, rather than revenge or revengeful actions, is argued as the better way of dissolving *han*. The collective forms of *hanpuli* in the public sphere, however, are mainly presented in collective practice, for example, workers movements, anti-state movements, and regionalist politics. *Hanpuli* is even illustrated as a driving force for economic activities underpinning fast industrialization and economic growth. Thus, *han* and *hanpuli* are regarded as crucial for understanding the particularity of Korean society. See, for example, CHOI Kil-Sung (1989); CHOI Sang-Jin (1993, 1991); CHUNG Hyun Kyung (1988); KIM Elaine H. (1993); KIM Choong Soon (1992); LEE Young-Hee (1994); LEE Hee-Kyung (1996, 1995); Lie (1998).

3) The post-liberation period and the Korean war have become popular subjects for artistic genres. A number of novels, poems in the 1980s and 1990s, for example, reintroduced individuals' experiences which could not be entirely dissolved in collective ones. Anger, sorrow, pain, unforgettability - culturally

The assumption underpinning the romantic approach of the students' movement was that many Koreans, or Koreans as a whole, wished to restore a durable one nation-state. More strictly, this argued a return to the past, rather than a new orientation for the future. It could also mean that the past should become the future, and the future should be made in the image of the past. The present situation does not generate criticism in itself. Rather, the source of the critical view of the present is what was already there and what is not available for the moment. At the same time and for that reason, the future is not simply suggested. Its path is strongly determined already by new problems in the present which did not exist in the past. Even though the past is certainly not symbolized as a prosperous time with abundant material resources for economic consumption, nor with the pride of being a dominant political power in regional politics, it is praised as a happy time for social and cultural life in the family and the community. At the individual level, divided Korea is ultimately symbolized as an essential source of pain, which never disappears, and which has lasted for several generations.

The unification movement in the late 1980s and the early 1990s was partly successful and partly failed. It was successful because the issue of unification and the relationship between the South and North began to be more considerably dealt with in state policies, on the one hand, and the peoples could make representations based on their own experiences at the individual level, which had been impossible in the period of state-centered modernization, on the other hand. It is important to remember that the reunification discourse was reintroduced in the public sphere in the period

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better understood as *han* (한) - are described through historical events.

of socio-economic transformation. It was a well-timed intervention of the romantic approach, when interest-based negotiation in the economic sphere began to emerge, and when the democratization of domestic politics was signalled. The triangular relation of nation, people and democracy was the irreducible core for understanding political and economic disputes. Thus, the 'reunification' agenda shaped the particularity of Korean politics, even spilling over to other social issues, but always emphasizing the national aspect.

The romantic approach of the unification movement partly failed, however, in that it only problematized the current situation from the view-point of a grand perspective of the future. It could not clearly show how to arrive at a reunified Korea, except by criticizing the USA and the South Korean state. Even though it was critical, particularly of the South Korean state's lack of endeavor, this was not further developed to the level of a national discourse on political and economic reunification. One could defend the unification movement under the romantic approach against the charge that its limits can be found in its subjective character: firstly, the political actors; the students' association, active artists, and other social movement groups. Secondly, the way of approaching the unification issue through individual and collective *han* (한恨). Rather, one would argue that the situational prematurity of the late 1980s and early 1990s is exposed, in terms of developing a unification discourse as a preparation for policies for reunification. The romantic approach of counter-state political actors was suddenly replaced by policy discourse at the state level, without a gradual linkage between the former and the latter. The discursive shift, by and large, came from the influence of the reunification of Germany.



***7.1.2. Korea as a polity: the development of the policy discourses of reunification and the lessons from the German experience of reunification***

While the political movement for reunification was dominated by romanticism, the social sciences - mainly in South Korea - extended their knowledge of the impact of division on the political situation in South Korea. The competition of the two Korean states for political legitimization (LEE ManWoo, 1993) and economic development, led to the restriction of political freedom and enforced a restrictive social life on individuals. The system of division was identified as the obstacle to democratization and even as the very source of major socio-political contradictions (PAIK Nak-chung, 1999, 1993). Many political scientists focused on the nature of the authoritarian state in terms of how it manipulated the political legitimacy of the state. The overall conclusion generally indicates that the state and several regimes have justified their political violence and illegitimate dominance of the state with anti-communist and anti-North Korean ideology. The confrontation and an unstable regional political situation have been used as resources for manipulating the crisis of the state and peoples' individual and social lives. The restriction of political activities in the political and economic spheres, suggested and sustained by the state and a conservative network, was justified by them as the inescapable self-limitation of democratic desires under the particular circumstances of South Korea. At the same time, a number of social scientists investigated the problematic contribution of North Korea to class movements. Just as much as the South Korean state's manipulation of North Korea's ready-made aggression for resuming war, the North Korean policies in response to the domestic politics of the South were criticized by some researchers of workers movements and by more theoretical analysts of

the Juche system. The Marxian perspectives, which experienced a resurgence in the academic world from the 1980s, began to produce criticism of North Korean ideology: the replacement of the law of societal development in history by the 'humanist' perspective; the overloaded idea of the nation as de-emphasizing class conflict; the lack of conceptual space for the activities of the trade-unions and developing workers' movements; the underdeveloped and ill-fitting methodological tools for investigating the social formation of South Korea, and so on. Thus, not only the South Korean, but also the North Korean state, were subjected to critical attack. In fact, however, the intellectual development of a dual criticism is a diagnosis of problems, rather than concrete proposals for reunification.

In fact, both the South and the North had been proposing reunification programmes to each other since 1972. However, the procedural problems, understood by them both as the most delicate and important agenda- South Korea demanded social and economic integration, while North Korea indulged in political and military issues- meant that state level reunification programmes never got off the ground (KIM Hong Nack, 1992; M.B.M. Suh, 1992). The reunification discourse since the 1990s in the South, has significantly dealt with the programmes of economic and political integration between the two states in an asymmetric manner. The changed international atmosphere - the collapse of the former Soviet bloc and the considerable success of South Korea's *nordpolitik* - and the widening economic gap between North and South Korea gave more weight to South Korea's role, not only from a Southern perspective, but also from an international one, and according to the German model of reunification (Eberstadt and Banister, 1992; Lin, 1992; Paus, 1998). Anticipating the collapse of North Korea in an economic crisis, policy scientists and

state-sponsored institutions began to estimate the financial cost of reunification.

German reunification, perhaps unsurprisingly, became the most valuable example for Korean policy makers. Analysis of the German experience, however, proved less than fruitful for the Korean context. The most important conclusion of policy scientists was that South Korea did not have the economic capacity to proceed the German way (Johnson, 1993; RHEE Kang Suk, 1993; Schmidt, 1993; SHIM K. R., 1993). More seriously, it was expected that the sudden collapse of North Korea would be deleterious to the South Korean economy (KIM Dae-Jung, 1993).<sup>4</sup> Thus, the analysis of the option for reunification by means of the absorption of North Korea into South Korea laid bare how unrealistic this was.

It has been pointed out that most policy scientists totally ignore the North Korean interest in reunification. They simply treat North Korea as the object of South Korean policy, rather than as one of the two subjects of reunification. Let us counter-factually imagine that South Korea has

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4) The debate between economists and policy scientists on the economic view of the reunification of Korea, developed in four ways, by and large: firstly, the measurement of the actual cost of reunification in Germany - whether or not reunification expenses should cover the investment in the Eastern region and the allocation of welfare services (Noland et al., 1998); secondly, the short term and the long term effects of reunification on the South Korean economy (Lee K.S., 1993; Noland et al., 1998); thirdly, the cost comparison between the immediate integration and the gradual one of the two economies in the South and the North (Eberstadt, 1997); fourthly, finding adequate means of transition for the North Korean economy (Shim, K.R., 1993; Barna, 1998).

sufficient economic capacity for managing the costs of unification, say as much as West Germany had. Could the German model still be recommended for South Korea or both Koreas? Is it a viable option to just let the North Korean state collapse? Or is it appropriate to enforce an economic transformation towards neo-liberal capitalism on North Korea, as the condition for economic aid? Social scientists tend to critically respond to these questions in three ways: firstly, in the critique of West German politicians, as well as their South Korean counterparts; secondly, a critical appraisal of the German model in terms of its lack of democratic public discourse and consequent problems; thirdly, the identification of 'progressive ethnic forces' in the Korean context.

East Germany, according to Martin HART-LANDSBERG, did not collapse simply because of internal problems:

Rather, West German leaders, in an attempt to ensure the dominance of existing West German political and economic institutions in a unified Germany, deliberately pursued policies designed to speed the breakdown of the East German system. ... West Germany aggressively pursued the collapse and absorption of the East and the resulting unification has not served the interests of the great majority of Germans (Hart-Landsberg, 1995: 59).

Further, he argues that the absorption of North Korea would be a disaster, not only for North Koreans, but also for South Koreans. He critically investigates the extent to which the South Korean state has pursued the isolation of the North to facilitate its collapse, comparing and contrasting West German policies refusing the legitimacy of East Germany in international relations in the 1960s and *Ostpolitik* since the 1970s, with South Korea's rigid alliance with Japan and the USA. Hart-Landsberg asserts that the South Korean government has learnt an important lesson

from Germany; that gradual unification by absorption is impossible (p.73). Accordingly, in order to maintain the current political and economic institutions and their relations, 'it hopes that economic need will eventually force the North to accept social cultural exchanges thereby leading to the rapid collapse and absorption of North Korea' (p.74). Finally, he concludes that unification by absorption is undesirable for the creation of a democratic and independent Korea.

Jürgen HABERMAS points to a serious problem in the German experience: 'Because there was *no public discussion of what citizens of the two states should expect of each other*, a certain discontent is now building up in the West, while feeling of resentment are spreading in the East' (Habermas, 1996: 12) (*italics added*). An increased dissatisfaction of Western taxpayers with redistribution to the East, mass unemployment in the East and the total collapse of East German institutions - 'from the economy, judicial system and state administration, through the regulation of traffic and health, to higher education, the media, the armed forces, and so on' (p.13) - are illustrated by Habermas as the mental side-effects of rapid unification. For him these negative experiences are important lessons for any possible Korean reunification.

PAIK Nak-Chung (1999, 1996) criticizes the Habermasian idea of separating a republican or democratic conception of the nation from an ethnic conception of the nation in the Korean context. 'Not only does the ethnic conception still have a powerful role to play in a heteronomously divided nation of exceptionally high ethnic homogeneity, it can serve to raise theoretical and practical questions of possibly global significance beyond providing a warning against the pitfalls of 'ethno-nationalism' (1996:

19). He significantly emphasizes the vital role of the Korean diaspora-numbering some four million in the strategic countries of the US, China, Japan and Russia alone- as the multi-national ethnic community, for Korea's democratic reunification. 'What Koreans should envisage ... is a new federative structure suited to our particular historical experience. This naturally includes the experience of a population with at least ten centuries of political unity and, even now, an exceptionally high degree of ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, *yet already with some proto-national divergences due to the length and severity of the division*' (pp. 20-1) (italics added). His assertion on ethnic nationalism, reflects the view, widely-spread in the Korean intellectual world, for reunification. For him and many others, the nation-state in the Korean context should be regarded as the cultural community as well as the polity. The proposal of the compound state/community (PAIK Young-Seo, 1999; PARK Myung-Kyu, 1999) and 'the cultural community of the Korean nation', including ethnic Koreans, arises not only from the practical awareness of the potential regional impacts of ethnic relations, but also from the theoretical challenge of ethnic nationalism in the social sciences, based on an historical understanding of the particularity of the Korean experience.

### ***7.1.3. Rethinking international politics and Korean nationalism***

The rigid system of division in Korea that has lasted since 1945 is now being undermined. The relationship between the two Korean states, which could only be described as 'hostile and antagonistic', is being gradually improved under a developing mutual recognition. The consequences of the historic meeting of the two leaders in June 2000 are being witnessed in the negotiation of political and security agendas as much as in economic and social ones. In spite of its significance compared with previous periods,

the current situation is being interpreted as the beginning of a long road. In fact, it remains unclear whether the destination is the coexistence of two states in an harmonious environment, or the reunification of Korea. However, the general consensus is that round table talks to solve issues of joint concern ultimately signify the re-emergence of an unified Korea.

In addressing the interpretation of the reunification process, it is firstly necessary to clarify the particular aspect of the nation-state in Korean politics and its implications. I have pointed out in previous chapters that Korea's relatively durable tradition of the nation-state, compared to national experiences in Europe, before colonization at the beginning of the twentieth century, was one of the major elements of Korean politics which informed Korean actors' particular ways of responding to new political situations under the global expansionism of imperial states. Besides, the main agenda of the Korean war was the accomplishment of the nation-state instead of two separate states. As the state ideology of North Korea, the inescapable political agenda of the South Korean state and as the main motif of anti-state movements in South Korean democratic movements, the political agenda of making an unified country has distinctively shaped the political direction of modernity in Korea. Put more bluntly, a series of uneven political events related to foreign powers has been the motivational source for strong nationalistic voices for public agendas.

It has been widely pointed out by foreign scholars and even acknowledged by their Korean counterparts, that Korean studies has itself strong nationalistic perspectives, that should be investigated for any understanding of the reunification discourse. Let me introduce two distinctive arguments: firstly, that historically Korea not only never invaded other countries, but

also never interfered in the domestic politics of neighboring countries, while it has very often been subjected to problematic neighbors' military attacks. Despite this, Korea secured its national sovereignty against foreign invasions, excepting colonization by Japan in the twentieth century. Secondly, in relation to these historical observations, nationalism in Korea is neither offensive nor expansive beyond its territory. Rather, it has been effectively represented as defending national sovereignty and national culture, even in the contemporary period.

The assumption that the Korean states never invaded other countries could be criticized as erroneous. There was expansion in the ancient period, when Goguryo enlarged its territory in west Manchu and the inner-mongol region and territorial enlargement by Koryo and Chosun also. Many Koreans, however, would understand these military expansions as 'restoration' of old territories which had been lost under previous states. Whatever the truth, and however historical facts are interpreted, the genuine claim underpinning this issue is that Koreans in history have been less aggressive than other peoples in the Chinese area, Japan and the Western countries, who have intervened in Korean politics since the nineteenth century. In fact, when one tries to historically evaluate the strong assumption of the non-aggressive characteristics of the Korean, s/he would at least indirectly face the comparison between what Korea did and what other countries did. Why did the Korean states not undertake military expansionism while their neighbors did? Many adduce Korea's weakness compared to others. However, some Koreans do not hesitate to say that it is because Koreans are peaceful people, and that Neo-Confucian state ideology is not capable of producing an expansionist logic.



This is not a simple debate merely concerning the past. Anticipation of the new regional situation in far East Asia after the reunification of Korea in the not-too-distant future, necessarily involves other regional powers and for the leaders of the Korean state, it demands the strategic preparation of securities and national interest (Blodgett, 1992). Hardly any regional power amongst China, Japan, Russia, the US expects a militarized Korea. There are, however, a couple of worrisome rumours regarding the new strategic situation.<sup>5</sup> While a realist view takes Korea's non-aggression as a relative weakness, an optimistic view would be derived from Korea's relatively trouble-free regional politics before the twentieth century (Macdonald, 1992) and from the similarities with a divided Germany, now reunified. Habermas explains that even though 'the unification of Germany could sometimes be perceived by its neighbors as a danger to the precarious balance within the European Union', a unified Germany has regulated its own ambition for political supremacy within Europe, in order to facilitate its political and economic integration within the European Union. Further, he argues that 'a unification of Korea would not necessarily be felt by its neighbors as a disturbing factor', because 'foreign policy becomes more directly based upon economics', and international cooperation in the Pacific area are would be strengthened (Habermas, 1996: 8).

The need for reunification as argued by intellectuals, includes a unified

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5) The most sophisticated issue concerns the withdrawal of US troops in South Korea. According to International Herald Tribune (16, October, 2000), the US and Japanese worry about the possible reemergence of Chinese power in the Korean peninsula after US withdrawal. However, the Korean and Chinese are also afraid of Japanese rearmament and a resurgence of Japanese militarism. Accordingly, retaining US troops is persuasive for Korea and China for the time being.

Korea's ultimate contribution to regional political stability. While a divided Korea distorts to a great extent democratic political activities in the two states (PAIK Nak-chung, 1993), military confrontation between them, that also involves other countries, has cast their relationship in aspic. However, to agree a way of proceeding with the reunification process is to immediately depressurize the military crisis and to engender mutual recognition of all the regional countries and the US, all of which is crucial for the economic prosperity of the region. If both Korean states were to renounce any plans to become a strong military power, capable of challenging the regional neighbors' sovereignties, and if they transparently restructured their armies for the reunification process, reducing personnel to the numbers appropriate purely for defense, then the neighboring countries would be more supportive of the reunification process.

Putting aside external points of view, let us reconsider the implications of the claim of a national pride in loving peace and having a non-aggressive nature for Koreans themselves: the self-interpretation of their own historical becoming. I will highlight here two aspects of the self-understanding that are contradictory: a highly plausible contribution to the settlement of peace in East Asia under a utilitarian perspective, on the one hand, at the same time as, on the deeper level, a critical and discriminative understanding of other countries' aggressiveness which must be introduced in comparison, on the other. Let us imagine a possible situation in which the claim of a historical tradition of peace-loving and non-expansionism would be introduced for a unified Korea's possible forswearing of territorial enlargement and military ambition. Is it problematic, even as a 'white lie' in an ultimate claim for truth? If it means that the political tradition is utilized in domestic political discourse for self-restraining those whose

ambitions would aim for a rollback against problematic neighbor countries and the US, is it not effectively performative? Or, if regional powers could praise the Korean tradition and widely encourage its continuation in the twentieth century, leading to a peaceful coexistence between them, is this not a considerable 'political option' for neighboring states? The ambivalence between effectiveness in politics and the truth of historical evaluation deserves consideration.

The Koreans' self-praise as non-offensive and peace-loving, however, not as 'one of many' in horizontal equality, but as 'better than others' in a vertical ordering, must be critically appraised. For, in fact, the self-evaluation of moral superiority over others, always devaluates the others' moral status. The Korean claim, which should be evaluated through historical research, would be essentially a comparative claim of morality. The moral comparison of aggressivity for those involved in Korean politics and the politics of the region, is provocative for philosophers and social scientists, in that it unveils two different understandings of collective identity and a holistic view of the characteristics of a people in a country.

Most of all, this warns us of the epistemological gap between several disciplines in the social sciences and philosophy. Whereas in many philosophical works the individual has been presupposed as the epistemological and ontological unit, for international politics and international relations, the state has been privileged. Presumably, what has been done by a state to other states is implicitly regarded as the doings of the people of a state to the other states' peoples. In spite of the existence of diverse actors in a state, once the state entered into international politics, the different views of their domestic actors disappeared and they

became unified under the view of the state. In other words, the state became their representative. While an imposed collective identity of the community on the individual, or the existence of a collective identity *ex hypothesi* argued to apply to others, has been subjected to severe sociological criticism, the position of the state in international politics has survived largely unscathed. Even though non-governmental organizations began to exert a considerable influence in state-centered politics regarding ecological, economic, humanitarian issues and so forth, their involvements in security issues and territorial and military disputes remain insignificant. Even an immediate re-questioning from foreign peoples to Koreans, "Do you mean that we do not like peace as much as you, Koreans?", "Are we more aggressive and troublesome than you?" and a further conceptual critique of the underpinning assumption of the holistic view of peoples' characters in the Korean claim, would not suffice to sway the effects of the Koreans' accumulated harsh experiences of strife in their country. The rigid idea of 'we', Koreans, which I criticized in previous chapters, and the claim of loving peace and being non-aggressive are an historically shaped self-satisfactory justification for a problematic regional politics.

It would be doubtful whether historical claims could be justified, either without corroborating factual evidence at the 'ultimate' level, or without implicit discrimination against others in the hierarchy of moral status. However, the interim conclusion, that factual evaluation cannot extricate itself from the contextual background of historical facts and the situational particularity of 'claiming' something, demands a most careful and detailed understanding of historical facts. Furthermore, the denial of claims demands a better historical evaluation and a normative criticism of the moral hierarchy that is inescapably mapped in a context. In other words, for the

Korean claims, the denial of their non-invasion of other states and their non-interference tradition, and the normative critique of a comparative evaluation of non aggressiveness, are also contextual responses. If these responses are undermined by the intention to defensively justify the historically evaluated aggressiveness of other regional powers with expansionist ambitions and further, if they still contribute to the maintenance of a problematic historical tradition, then the proponents of this counter-critique must also be criticized.

The particularity of Korean nationalism, if such a thing exists, would be that it becomes significantly responsive to the provocative claims of state sovereignty for political and economic agendas, as much as for cultural issues. The mode of response has not only been collective, but also so furious as to brook no opposition. It is the collective memory of Korean history that has condemned innocent Koreans to suffer at the hands of external powers, many instantly responding to national issues with a sort of spirit of self-sacrifice. Such an historically accumulated mode of behavior reflects the psychological status of *han* (한恨), which is extremely powerful in Koreans' self-interpretation as victims, on the one hand, and the world as the unfair entity from which the self is suffering, on the other.

To me the worst scenario, that has ramifications for the political geography in East Asia after the reunification of Korea, does not come from the Koreans', the ambitious project of the restoration of Manchu (AHN Cheon, 1990), or from the political payback for the colonial experience and the division of the Korean peninsula. Rather, it concerns the possible misjudgment of neighboring states, oblivious to or choosing to ignore Koreans' psychological instability, which must last for the time being, in

dealing with any political, military or economic agenda. Extrapolating from historical form, it is unlikely that Korean political actors would take any initiative in regional politics. However, they must be ready to react to the emerging situation, unlikely their predecessors, because nationalism is now so deeply rooted in Korean society as to possibly lead public discourse to extreme and risky paths.

## **7.2. The desirability of a new boundary-oriented politics and the remaining political dangers**

### ***7.2.1. Korean Unification: A necessity of a national project in the Post-national era***

The (South) Korean debate on the (re)unification of Korea clearly shows the current state of the Korean social sciences in dealing with national issues. While the romantic way of arguing the necessity for unification introduces a diagnosis for Koreans who suffer under the division of Korean peninsula, its basic perspective is to restore the tradition of a united Korea. In other words, it is a past-oriented idea of dealing with current problems. However, some social scientists discover the necessity for unification in reasons other than those of cultural homogeneity or a communitarian idea of collective memory, that is to say, from the political situation of two Korean states. They emphasize the limited nature of democracy in South Korea within a divided country. As I have shown, the hostile relationship between the two states and supporting conservative-networks have had a strong impact on domestic politics towards the maintenance of authoritarian regimes. The democrats' position within unification discourse reflects the relationship between the system of divided Korea and domestic politics. In other words, South Korea itself is understood by them as 'the blockaded polity' due to the conflictive political structure firmly rooted in ideological

tensions among political actors, where a divided country operates as a negative imperative on democratization.<sup>6</sup> Another political position advocating the unification of Korea exists outside of unification movements. The authoritarian state and a rigidly rooted conservative-network also argue the necessity of unification. However, for many reasons, their standpoints exist only in a nominal way. Their hostile attitude to their North Korean counterparts has failed to make any significant contributions to the unification discourse, and they continue to propose absorption of the other. It could be argued that just as much as the South Korean conservatives, many leading political groups in North Korea have the same type of stubborn policy towards South Korea. Nevertheless, their different ideological backgrounds and different historical experiences in tension, have

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6) Crozier's (1994, 1987, 1982) investigation of the French situation in which many actors in several French organizational systems form a collective human tension with other actors, led him to coin the term, *société bloquée*. While rigid bureaucratic conditions, historically developed in French organizational culture as the major organizational problem for French society, is clearly described in his analysis, Crozier suggests an institutional alternative in new policy-orientations for state affairs through which the bureaucratic system and the problematic actors- technocrats, for example- are cured. For some Korean social scientists, South Korea, as the structurally blockaded polity - the descriptive term paraphrased from the Crozierian idea of the problem of social systems in a Korean political context - could not be fully cured - this would mean the democratization of politics - by any institutional consequence of the political relationships between the conservative network and democratic actors. Rather the process of unification of two Korean states is understood as one of the major conditions for the political development of democracy.

fostered a quite different orientation toward unification.

This is a highly particular political discourse based on a type of boundary-politics directly intending to change or maintain the political boundary itself. Especially when the issue of democracy is tied to it, it cannot be classified as a nationalist claim for unification. For the unification of Korea itself is not put forward as the ultimate task for the people in Korea. Rather it is argued as the correct path for a democratic reshaping of politics on behalf of the people in the Korean context. It is supported by a realistic conclusion that deconstructing the division system for Korea is entirely necessary, for without it the democratic reshaping of South Korean politics could not be achieved- I have introduced in chapter 5 some empirical examples supporting the claim of the negative influence of North Korea in South Korean politics. From the problems arising from the existence of a rigid boundary politics and from its alternatives pertaining to the Korean context, the general understanding of the problems of the nation-state in dealing with national and international issues could be considerably revised. For the national setting of boundary politics under the European experience does not, *pari passu*, apply to the East Asian region, where the construction of nation-states has a relatively long history. For some political actors in Korea making the nation-state is an incomplete and highly urgent project of the twenty-first century, despite the historical memory of the nation-state system that is deeply rooted in historiography. This could then be introduced as the critical example of an evolutionist idea for the history of political integration; from city-state to regional supra-national state via the nation-state.

#### ***7.2.2. European Integration: the necessity of a regional project beyond***



### *civilizational backgrounds*

In terms of evaluating the problems of civilizational analyses in the social sciences, the discourse on the current process of European integration could be highly productive, in the double sense of identifying open possibilities for deconstructing a rigid collective identity or enclosing it within a negative development. In other words, it seems impossible to avoid the basic inquiry on the feasibility of Europe as a civilizational boundary, an inquiry that is in itself enough to determine, or at least to influence, the beginning and the end of current economic and political integration in the region (see, Patocka, 2002 for the philosophical construction; Rietbergen, 1998 for cultural development). Even though the beginning of institutional development for economic integration was shaped by the economic and political interests of some states, the accelerating process of economic and political integration since the 1990s has been driven by the high national interests of the member states.

In how many works are the civilizational backgrounds introduced for identifying the reasons for current European integration? While there could be very different perceptions on this matter among a number of states indirectly or directly related to the integration process, it is hardly as influential as current political and economic interests. The civilizational analysis could be understood, at best, as a marginalized approach, even though one could argue that it provides a mode for the reinterpretation of major issues in the policy-making process. However, while it is certainly true that many scholars are rather reluctant to investigate civilizational agendas in the public discourse, because they might fundamentally determine the pursuit of political and economic integration, it is desirable that the civilizational interpretation of European integration should be more

widely dealt with in intellectual discourse. The most powerful merit and demerit, at the same time, of civilizational analysis as such, is its instant relevance for the question of what Europe is, which, although very general, is quite a basic question, with huge implications for 'EUROPEAN' integration.

The civilizational framework could have a significant impact on the current integration process, as a means of finding its major rationale in the long-term history of the region (Spohn, 2000a, 2000b; Delanty, 2001a, 1995). The problem of utilizing a civilizational framework, as I have argued in the introduction, is that it exclusively sets a boundary as the container of homogeneous backgrounds for members within the boundary. The development of the nation-state system based on a grand scale in the enlightened political projects in the European region, has regulated, to some extent, the religious influences over politics and economic activities, even though its expansion to other regions has been partly dependent on the idea of a 'civilizing mission' including religion. The occurrence of major military conflicts in the twentieth century, including the impact of the Russian revolution in 1917, could be understood as the consequence of the tension between national and regional identity.

It does not appear beyond the realms of possibility to anticipate the possible emergence of a new situation in which religious factors, cultural elements and any type of enlightenment projects could be reconnected, once the regulative power of nation-oriented politics becomes less influential. Although this is a very simple anticipation, it is very difficult to ignore, because at least in the intellectual history concerned with civilizational analysis, the exclusive formation of a civilizational boundary is seldom

criticized. In other words, whereas the substance of European civilizations has often been critically dealt with in intellectual works, the idea of a European civilization has not itself been subjected to fundamental criticism. Recent debates on Eurocentrism (Wallerstein, 1998, 1997; McLennan, 2000) and Fundamentalist movements (Eisenstadt, 2000a, 1999) could be categorized in the former trend rather than the latter. Following the latter orientation, could one argue that European civilization historically never existed? It is possible to approach this question in several ways. However, as I noted in the introduction, any objective answers based on an atemporal perspective immediately face the critical dilemma, that the process of ascertaining the contents of European civilization could not fully exclude an additional construction of its counterparts. In other words, proving the existence of European civilization is to unavoidably pass comment on any form of non-European civilization and recognizing its contents is only possible when its counterparts are at least partially alluded to. However, this also applies to the atemporality of hermeneutic critique that focuses on the structural formation of comparative elements. A more sophisticated and indirect suggestion of the contents of European civilization occurs when the origins of some institutional frameworks for politics and economic activities, on the one hand, and for cultural and religious ones, on the other, are emphasized, while being detached from any initial boundary of creation. The primary purpose of investigating the detaching/attaching process - whatever terms in different nuance are additionally used: exportation/importation, expansion/reaching, implantation, replacement, etc. - is not to compare boundaries themselves but to highlight the development of institutions from one place to another and to investigate any possible changes within this movement. Some comparative works in the recent debate on multiple modernities and many works in regional studies could

be classified under this approach. I have argued in the introduction, commenting on the Eliasian perception of the West, that the idea of multiple modernities is tied up with a boundary-oriented comparative sociology in which the assumption of the existence of a clear border between several political and cultural entities partly determines the direction of comparative and historical research (see, Frieze and Wagner 2000b for the critique of the culturalist understanding of multiple modernities).

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 intended to raise the question of how the actors, who accept the political and economic alternatives initially developed in a different context as their own tools for political and economic vision, basically understand the issue of the spatial origins of institutional alternatives. The institutional frameworks of major Korean political actors in the twentieth century, as I introduced in chapter 4 and illustrated in chapters 5 and 6 with empirical examples of disputes and policy-orientations, in fact have their origins in Europe including Russia and North America. However, the identification of the origins of the institutional alternatives, which significantly influenced major political actors' practice, if not fully determining their understanding, were not entirely critically questioned by Korean actors themselves, unlike their predecessors' hostile reactions to them in the second half of the nineteenth century. Just as the expansion of Christianity in Korea was a political reaction to Japanese-style modernization at the beginning of the twentieth century, so many institutional alternatives were rooted in major political actors' practical recognition that their goals might be achieved with the help of newly introduced alternatives from outside. It is, of course, also true that there were many other actors who reacted negatively to foreign alternatives. However, the manner of criticizing foreign alternatives - I have introduced

in chapter 6 some nationalist ideas of political actors and intellectuals in the cultural sphere - is to protect the national interest over foreign influences, where major institutional alternatives from outside are in many cases treated as an aggressive matrix of expansion by foreign actors backing their own national interests. In other words, many discourses related to the spatial origins of modern institutions and their current status are deeply shaped by the boundary-oriented attitudes of political actors and political intellectuals who differently interpret factual evidence within their own normative orientations.

In the introduction, I noted that the possible interpretations of what is illustrated in the main chapters as Korean modernity, as such does not help to advance the idea of multiple modernities in comparative-historical sociology beyond a boundary-oriented theorizing. What has been argued in this thesis as an important issue for any comparative-historical research covering long-term political processes and societal change, is that one should neither seek to identify any long-term continuation of a socio-political model in a given boundary, or its sudden radical changes and its replacement by others, on the one hand, nor to conclusively argue Korea as the container of the dynamic relations between major political actors, on the other. Rather, what is important is the existence of the historical flow in which, in spite of different political orientations with different normative ideas, overall actors have firmly practiced their orientations. This path even includes the abandonment of a source for their identity, Korea, itself arising from the colonial experience, explained in chapters 2, 3.

The discourse on current European integration includes two important ways of understanding the historical flow of political actors in the European

context: firstly, the significance of the boundary for political actors in a new political situation; secondly, reshaping political actors themselves in the changing boundary politics (see, Friese, Negri and Wagner, 2002 for new political construction of Europe; Friese and Wagner, 2002 for reviewing the philosophical dimension of the discourse). As far as the first theme is concerned, the relationship between an existing national boundary and an emerging regional one occupies a crucial place in the discourse, while the second theme needs to be reevaluated under in light of the change in political relationships between national actors in the regional boundary of a new politics. Behind the overall scepticism towards European integration, there is often the reasoning that the qualities of life for members of a nation-state, secured by the national boundary, would be disturbed by the process of integration, whereas integrationists assume that the current nation-state system is unable to provide better conditions, due to a changing political and economic situation that has ramifications for the national boundary. At the same time, sceptics anticipate that well-organized national institutional measurements, developed over a long period by the people, would be rendered useless by the decisions of representatives from extra-national communities, whereas integrationists argue that major policy decisions in the nation-state for the future of the nation are already under threat by global political and economic influences. Unlike practical sceptics and idealists, who concern themselves with procedural problems and the lack of clear normative orientations for the actual process of institutional development, some anti-integrationists are hell bent on fully securing state sovereignty from any external influence, while many integrationists intend to find a coordinated answer to state sovereignty in a regional framework.

What should be importantly recognized in the discourse on the current

status of boundary politics in the European context, is that the nation-state system becomes more and more treated as a historically produced political entity (see, Zimmermann, Didry and Wagner, 1999 for French and German experiences), for which further roles are contested in the contemporary situation. The difficult point for anti-integrationists in this issue, is that without considerable dependence on the symbolic totality of the nation and its political form, the nation-state, which has been constructed in processes of political and economic transformation on the grand scale, they could not suggest any new type of political and economic ways for maintaining the nation-state system. Because of their impotence in suggesting new political and economic projects for the nation, they take the conservative position against European integration, allowing them to see no positive possibilities in the on-going integration process. In short, the conservative position in the discourse on European integration is determined by their self-satisfaction for what they have achieved rather than preparing the way for what they have yet to achieve. However, there is also a problematic dimension for some integrationists who initially identify the integration process as the extension of the national project. One problem that occurred in the process of expanding the nation-state system, was to build clear borders between nation-states where some cultural communities were fragmented and where borders became the place for tension. The internal homogenization process at the regional level might again provoke this fragmenting process at its new borders. The perception of the existence of borders, intertwined with a strong regional identity - in the era of national building it was a strong national identity - would occur when political actors interpret their policy-oriented practices within the normative framework of the boundary itself and symbolically totalized the European people as a whole. For the political actors who are required to justify their actions in policy discourse,

at least partial engagement of their political vision in regional interests as much as national interests, is very difficult to avoid if they are to persuade the public and other participants in the discourse. And this, because an interest-based attitude plays such a big part in the current integration process. There is a lot of space for dealing with the issue of change; from national to regional politics and actors, likewise, in empirical research on the current stage of European integration. In a sense, it is arguable that becoming a regional actor could provide a good opportunity to solve the dead-lock of issues at the national level (Bourdieu, 1998; Habermas, 2001; Zürn, 1999). In another sense, in the process of becoming regional actors many national actors should have additional qualifications for dealing with regional issues at the national level and national issues at the regional level. However, when political actors limit their roles to those of agents of the boundary - in other words, the actors self-regulate their roles within the political structure, once made, but later regarded as the source of legitimacy - for representing regional interests, then boundary-oriented political activities would still be maintained in the actors' mode of practice.

#### **Conclusion: Political Agendas of Modernity in Contemporary Korea**

It seems fair to say that there has been a significant political transformation of Korean society since 1987, roughly correlative to the political experience of regime changes, the economic experience of the vulnerability of risk-taking developmentalism and the cultural experience of the fragmentation of traditional values. It is also observable that in the political sphere, major political discourses have shifted from achieving a democratic state through abolishing the authoritarian state as the most urgent political task, to developing fine democratic agendas adequate for Korean society and for achieving the unification of Korea. Within the



observation of overwhelming uncertainties in dealing with newly emphasized political agendas, on the one hand, and within the anticipation that Korean society would be determined for the time being by the consequence of the totality of political actors' interactions, on the other, the current political situation could be recognized as a highly critical one for modernity in the Korean context.

When one considers that South Korea has been deeply involved in international politics and the global economy, it is not so difficult to anticipate the double possibilities that the future of South Korea holds, simultaneously as impacted by and as impacting upon them. For this reason, the unification of Korea as the project of a new boundary politics, for example, could have an international meaning beyond the Korean community. If modernity could be understood, without serious conceptual distinction between it and its counterparts, as emphasizing the meanings of contemporary political agendas, current Korean politics must be regarded by political actors as a new situation in which new political projects will necessarily materialize. When they present their own value orientations in practice, this could be understood as the actors' high fidelity to modernity in that they actively respond to modernity as *problematique* (Wagner, 2001b).

## Conclusion: reconsidering the social imaginary in comparative-historical sociology

### On the epochal idea of modernity

This thesis has been concerned with political history and relations among political actors in Korea from the end of the fourteenth century onwards. More or less six hundred years of history were investigated in order to undermine the widely assumed epochal idea of modernity. The question raised is how we can understand the strong idea of epochal rupture if the emergence of the Neo-Confucian state is dated at 1392. Around this basic question, what is striking is, even though the characteristics of the new state, Chosun, are highly questionable if compared to the image of modern institutions in contemporary Korea or of its previous states, the main actors involved in building Chosun had a clear idea of what they were doing according to their own normative foundation. They intended to reshape not only Chosun's state structures but also its societal elements. Chosun could therefore be regarded as an example of a major social and political imaginary for Korean history. In the regional context, the nation-state system became firmly established after the emergence of Chosun. Even though Chosun should not be regarded as the first nation-state in Korean history, it seems clear to me that it is a fully recognizable and sociologically analyzable example of the nation-state in the Korean context. However, an additional observation would be that the major socio-political and ethical relations of that time could not be accepted as normatively plausible for the contemporary situation. At the same time, any intellectual judgement that extends from the modern age back to the earlier historical period is not fully realizable. Given the fact that there were inconsistent elements, from a modern perspective, the comparative understanding of

political institutions for the early age as products of modernity, has rather limited persuasive power in dealing with the contextual meaning of those political products. Thus, although contemporary perspectives on the past, where meanings are newly or distinctively created, or dead, should be understood as a basic attitude for introducing 'History' into sociological theorizing, a conceptual confusion between 'discovery' and 'creation' in understanding the past appears when the meanings of previous political projects are embedded in an attempt to conceptually link them to their contemporary counter-parts.

The investigation of the actual relationship between modernity and tradition as the process of political and economic transformation towards modernity - which has been dealt with in chapter 2 - seems especially difficult for the Korean context. Above all, it was the colonial experience that largely determined the political relationship among Korean actors in the transformative period. Just as the emergence of Chosun could be understood as a cosmological conflict between emerging Neo-Confucianism and dominant Buddhism, in late nineteenth century, there could have been another cosmological conflicts among multiple religious actors; dominant Neo-Confucianism versus *Donghak*, Catholicism, Protestantism, etc. In terms of dealing with cosmological and religious agendas, however, the conflicts between major religious actors - who were at the same time major political actors who could have determined the Korean path towards modernity - were shaped by political interventions. Finally, they became mere religious participants of modernization, even though they assumed different roles under colonization that encouraged further separation between religion and politics. Also, the issue of the traditional kingship system and the new form of state was not fully resolved as an outcome of the dynamic tension

between political actors. Rather, it became the issue subsequently solved through colonization and independence movements. Even though this demands further research, the implication of the lack of experience for changing the state format to build a new nation-state in post-liberation politics is crucial. Both the political conflicts over the state in South Korea and a socialist path in North Korea, lacked a strong advocacy of democracy and human rights as a driving force for shaping the new nation-state. The effect of colonization, for major political actors, was to place the emphasis on the creation of a new nation-state, rather than taking universal human rights as their primary concern (Shaw, 1991). Mapping the historical path to modern society in a sociological understanding - as in the Parsonian project of achieving 'full' modernity (Parsons, 1971), for example - should explain the process of dual ruptures that occurred, not only in the economic and political spheres, but also in the religious and cosmological one - as Weber's interpretation on the role of religious (Protestant) ethics for the rise of capitalism (Weber, 1996) and Marx and Engels's scientific formulation of economic and political activities for overcoming the capitalist mode of societal development (Marx and Engels, 1975). Regrettably, these two grand transformations for understanding modernity in the Korean context lose explanatory power consequent to the breakdown of the Korean polity around the turn of the twentieth century, after which the issue for the subjects of modernity, inescapably raised the question of national identity over and above economic or political positions as the class relations.

It is arguable that the development of modernist ideas in Korean studies could be understood as the most significant legacy of colonialism for intellectual attitudes. Whereas colonialist historicism is normally understood

as a historiography for positively interpreting Japanese roles in colonial modernization, on the one hand, and for relatively ignoring Koreans' capabilities for achieving modernization, on the other, several debates on the early modernization process lead unerringly to the conclusion, that the deeply rooted state-centered model of development and the widely used nationalist narrative in modern historiography should be acknowledged as the intellectual legacy of the colonial experience: the development-centered economic model, which has dominated South Korean modernization, has been supported by a nationalist ideology manipulated by the authoritarian state. Although it is not clearly argued by individual scholars, Korean studies in general has been shaped by an idea of Korean modernity that also treats the European and North American experience as objective models or ideal-types. Under the comparative perspective that presupposes ideal-types, we can see that the social sciences in Korean studies have been shaped by a version of boundary-oriented theorizing (SHIN Jong-Hwa, 2000b).

How could the two-state system since 1948 be interpreted in light of a historical understanding of the long-term development of the nation-state system in Korean history, when both the state-centered idea and the nation-centered one form an interpretative tension in the Korean case? Faced with this question, which has been dealt with in chapter 4, 6 and 7, I have doubted the epochal meaning of the nation-state, which is widely assumed for the social sciences, for modernity. I have stressed instead, the cultural and political motivations for building the nation-state in general. One could object that my position is firmly grounded in the Korean experience, without considering European cases for the establishment of the nation-state. I would immediately counter by asking how it is possible to

draw the global history of political systems? In addition, the idea of an on-going long term process for state formation neither questions its origin nor maps its end. The Korean experience does not have any highly plausible theory of state formation, if the current situation is evaluated in the consideration of its own past as well as its contemporary counterparts. The problem arises from a research attitude that implicitly assumes that the grand theory of state formation could be built on the comparison of boundaries for collective political activities. The current two-state system in Korean politics could be introduced as one of the critical examples for reconsidering the conceptualization of boundary politics as well as doubting the meaning of the firm linkage between the state and the nation as a modern phenomenon. Above all, if the epochal distinction of the modern age is firmly based on the institutional matrix, that the current South Korean and North Korean state have endured since 1945, one could argue that the institutional development of the modern nation-state has been achieved at the expense of the fragmentation of the nation into two polities.

#### **The need for a genealogical understanding of the state in Korea**

If the history of the state is investigated in terms of the recognition of state authority by political actors, South Korea seems historically to have had at least three different types of relationship between the state and political actors: the peoples' collective contest of state authority; groups from the political elite contesting state authority; political actors' struggle without contesting state authority. Although these types of relationship would not accord to each historical time, different combinations of the three types of relationship could well explain particular characteristics for each historical period within the genealogical understanding of the state.

The colonial experience of the relationship between the state and Korean political actors hardly fits with the third type. Despite the fact that some of Korean political actors denied political authority for the colonial state, they had hardly any ambition to struggle for its political power. In fact, it was impossible for the Korean actors to compete with the Japanese counter-parts due to a number of institutional limitations based on ethnic discrimination. The first and second types, however, are widely observable. The intellectual critique of the colonial state and collective organizations of several political struggles for the independence of Korea, indicates that many Korean political actors had a highly negative view of the political authority of the colonial state.

Through the Chosun period, the first and second types are seldomly identified, except in a few collective rebellions of the nineteenth century, while the third type is apparent. The former were infrequent, because the political authority of the state, which was firmly intertwined with the symbolic power of kingship, had a strong ideological foundation, (Neo-)Confucianism. The political elite of intellectuals - including the Confucian literati - and the people, were prone to the political authority of the state. Political conflict tended to be monopolized within the elite and thus excluded other groups from state activity, without contesting the legitimacy of the state. For them, the political authority of the state was the given condition under which their practices, undertaken to further their political influence, became justifiable.

In the political situation after the liberation of Korea from colonization in 1945, all three types are clearly visible. Above all, the changes of regime

up to the 1980s, were largely the result of peoples' collective political activity, through which alternative programmes to the state became widely promulgated. Secondly, a number of groups of the political elite contested the authority of the state. The occurrence of military conflicts within the South Korean territory in the late 1940s and the early 1950s could be understood as a relevant example of the second type. Moreover, the discourse for the unification of Korea could itself be said to reflect the problem of political authority for the South Korean state. Further, it is also true that the reemergence of socialist ideas in political discourse, at least since the 1980s, directly addresses the constitutive problem of the current Korean state. However, the most commonly observable type is the third one. The development of parliamentary politics toward democratic institutionalization, in spite of its non-linear and tension-ridden process, to some extent continuously transformed distrust of state authority, widely spread among many political actors, to dissatisfaction with the regimes themselves. Experiences of changes in the regimes led radical actors' political interests to change also, from the making of an alternative state, to the remolding of the existing state in order to achieve democracy. If both the underdeveloped institutionalized freedom of Korean politics is minimized, and the Sombartian (1976) reminder of the specificity of societies in comparison is invoked, then the historical relationship of the state and political actors for the Korean situation would be reminiscent more of many national cases in Europe rather than the North American experience. The existence of strong counter-state discourses with long-term visions in the political sphere - in many cases expressed as a socialist alternative to the current state -, belies a certain level of political tension among actors, which were sometimes represented as people's collective rejection of state authority, the development of independent socio-political



movements outside parliamentary politics and so on. In other words, modern Korean society as a whole is a highly political one.

Why has Korean society become highly political and how could the relationship between political actors be the main source for societal developments including the economic and political process? Such questions necessitate a review of the historical process of political rupture concerning the role of the state. Radical changes in the state have been effected through the emergence of new political actors who often replaced their traditional counterparts. Interestingly, the processes through which a new form of political relations among actors emerged, were neither peaceful nor gradual. For example, the collapse of the Korean state under colonization at the turn of the twentieth century and the highly negative implications of the colonial state for political development, the emergence of two modern states in Korea, the military conflict between them and the post-war development of authoritarian modernization with its severe restriction of political activity, inflamed the legitimation crisis of the state, resulting in many counter-state political actors becoming more politically active and less institutionally stabilized, whereas the state became highly instrumentalized for the actors occupying positions within it. In terms of the increased instrumentality of the state, the colonial state and the new South Korean state- and possibly the North Korean state also- developed considerable political mechanisms for controlling non-state political actors. A by-product of this organized form for the monitoring of socio-political and economic activities, or the flip-side of an underdeveloped institutional freedom for political activity, meant that Korea experienced rapid economic growth as a consequence of the state's guidance and efficient mobilization of socio-economic resources.

An over-powered state, compared to non-state actors in the economic and political sphere, has resulted in a bi-polarized politics that was highly determinant for generating reactions from political actors outside the state sphere. The independence movement in which many Korean actors took part, for example, was a counter-political response to the loss of sovereignty of the state, and the quest for the united front over center-left and center-right in post-liberation politics was also a political way of preventing the emergence of two separate states. In addition, the democratic movement in 1960 was a successful counter-state politics, fomented by the transgressions of the first republic, while the partial achievement of institutional political freedom since 1987, can be seen as a political reaction to 20 years of authoritarian modernization. In a broad sense, it can be argued that the political tension between the state and a newly constructed conservative network in each political stage, on the one hand, and counter-state actors and widely emerging contentious peoples, on the other, has been maintained since the turn of the twentieth century. If the former has had actual political power in the asymmetric relationship, this has not allowed it to politically construct a moral superiority, which has belonged instead to the latter, who have claimed persuasive justifications for anti-state activities, despite a serious lack of power. Politicized Korean society, thus, has been produced as the consequence of rigid political tension.

The rigidity of bi-polar politics began to be fragmented around the 1990s. The reasons for political transformation have been several rather than one main cause. Firstly, thanks to an economic transformation that occurred under the condition of political authoritarianism, changes in the economic

sphere have impacted on the social and cultural sphere, in terms both of the development of modern industrial society and of its related institutional frameworks. Secondly, however, while these societal changes have reflected political problems, existing counter-state actors, who gained experience under harsh conditions, have been identified as the alternative political agent. Lastly, was the failure of the authoritarian state to maintain and reproduce an out-dated ideology justifying the uneven development of the economy and politics for the changed context. Why had the authoritarian style of modernization become exhausted? A basic answer can be found in the widening gap between the justification for rules and their lack of efficacy under conditions of social transformation. In the initial stage for the introduction of a highly organized form of modernization and its collective practices, a problematic goal-reasoning invariably enforced an 'objectified' rule-following that ignores particular actors' interests. As institutions became rooted in the modernization process, the temporary acceptance of imposed rules began to be contested, consequently resulting in widespread criticism of the subject of rule-making, the state. This may well explain why political movements began to pursue a general line for the execution of fair rules, why the political change of course in 1987 has not developed into a more radical change of state form, and why the fragmentation of democratic actors and counter-state actors went hand-in-hand with the emergence of civil society discourse in the public sphere.

Korean politics since the 1990s has been in transition. In spite of the fact that over the long-term the conventional structure of bi-polar politics has already broken down, the political tradition of major political actors that are shaped in antagonistic and hostile tension, remains and from time to

time, resurfaces as a major influence for particular political discourse. More problematically, Korean politics as a whole is still sensitive to the ebb and flow of international politics. Historically, Korean politics has been fundamentally restructured by world politics and its regional influence, that has caused many actors' demise and prompted the emergence of others. One of the grand political events for Korean politics, the reunification of two Korean states, is inextricably connected to the world stage. Even though it remains unclear whether the unification agenda will be resolved as the consequence of world politics, as for previous major political ruptures, or whether it will actively instigate a new possibility for world politics, one thing is clear; the future of Korean politics, in terms of its grand historical shape, will not be understood independently of the world process.

The historical track to current Korean politics reveals some radical ruptures, around which the rise and fall of several intellectual paradigms has coincidentally occurred. The scale of intellectual changes includes not only the main objects of inquiries, but also the way of producing inquiries under any particular cosmological background. Any attempt to produce a 'strong theory' of evolutionary process for the history of the Korean state - ..., Koryo, Chosun, (the empire of Great Han), the colonial state, (the US or Soviet military state), two Korean states (ROK and DPRK) -, has limited explanatory power. As many works in Korean studies have pointed out, the emergence and development of the three major forms of the state was supported by emerging intellectual flows that underpinned new forms and negated previous forms of the state and their related intellectual resources. How then can the historical map of the state be drawn?

### **On modernity and political actors**

The overall interpretations of the thesis for understanding the Korean experience of political transformation, are based on the assumption that the historical evaluation of the political process within a given boundary should necessarily include the particular historical elements which are found in the history of the boundary. In other words, the Korean experience would be more plausibly interpreted when its contextuality is emphasized. However, it is important for me to acknowledge that the basic assumption would itself be problematic for empirical research, unless the investigation of a political and cultural boundary was at least supported by knowledge of other boundaries. Without an implicit or explicit comparison with others, construction of the political history of a boundary could not produce any distinctive characteristics at all. The Japanese and European experiences of political transformation and related issues, have here played a role for comparison, while many works in the social sciences concerned with interpreting the meanings of historical events in the regions have been utilized in order to understand their Korean counterpart. Such a methodology could be criticized for following the same line as 'the mirroring research' that I have pointed to in some works in Korean and Japanese studies and its effect on theorizing their historical experiences. However, so long as the purpose of this thesis is to sketch the dynamics of the political sphere, rather than a direct formulation of the characteristics of Korean politics itself, so long as it intends to build a different type of comparison that focuses on actors' political practices beyond the cross-national comparison that totalizes the national subject, such criticism can be staved off for the time being. A second element for overcoming the basic premise of the contextual reading is to identify the fact that a cultural and political space does not necessarily have one authentic interpretation.

Especially when long-term historical transformation is dealt with and when the rise and fall of many political actors are investigated for the theoretical argument, the occurrence of intellectual disagreements for the interpretation of historical events and the roles of political actors, becomes inevitable. In other words, interpretation includes a crucial element beyond the shadow of context and the factual reading on evidences.

Needless to say that the free space for interpretation, which is beyond any additional knowledge for a contextual reading, is the normative motivation through which interpretation itself is directed in its orientation. As far as broad historical analysis is concerned, the normative orientations could be revealed not only by a scholars' methodological framework, but also by their questions and the direction of their investigation. Even though the degree of embedded normative orientation would be different, the problem posed around questions in some ways fundamentally determines the overall direction of the research process. In a sense, the making of a conceptual space begins at that very moment of raising questions. Questions invoked concerning civilizational backgrounds, national traditions, and economic and political interests, shape the understanding of collective heritages around civilizational ideas, national identities and the necessities for economic and political achievements. Even when disagreements arise from a total rejection of the mode of questioning itself - the denial of the existence of such an entity, civilizational boundary, nation - that advocate the existence of a high degree of cultural and historical homogeneity and develop sophisticated typological comparison, the influence of such questions in the debate on civilizational and national identities remains influential unless and until the discursive mode is itself radically changed. Scholars cannot fully free themselves from the customized usage of the problematic vocabularies, even

when they criticize them as forms of ideology. Ironically, although in this thesis I negate any given homogeneity for diverse political actors, I nonetheless describe them as 'Korean' actors. Even though I try to minimize the power of verbal expression, its configurative power over understanding primary images cannot be fully eliminated until they become reconfigured with different labels. The same problem, more or less, occurs when current political actors, or previous actors in the European region are introduced as European actors, even though the idea of European civilization is empirically and theoretically contestable.

Theories of multiple modernities have been widely influenced by boundary-oriented comparison. One could argue that treating political and cultural boundaries as given, has its own empirical evidence and a certain theoretical validity. However, as I have already pointed out, the problematic dimension arises from the fact that the distinctiveness of boundaries has gained its proofs more and more from comparative-historical sociology rather than the customized mode of boundary distinctions operating with an essentialist idea of cultural power, has lost its explanatory power. However, there are also two different modes of theorizing for multiple modernities in terms of identifying the roles of actors in the political sphere. While many works in this field regard modernity as the societal project as such, some works highlight a process of emerging modern achievements in which political projects inaugurated by major actors have shaped modernity. Under the former view, scholars focus on the overall novel configuration of modernity, itself based on societal movement from its past to a present that is deeply influenced by its civilizational heritages, while under the latter, scholars concentrate on the question of how modern ruptures occurred through the contribution of new political actors and attempt to comprehend

the interplay between actual political and economic transformations and intellectual responses. The advantage of the latter perspective over the former is that it is highly applicable for interpreting current political processes and could possibly open even more radical interpretations for dealing with prevailing political and economic agendas. The nation-state and its related economic forms, for example, have been investigated as historical projects driven by political actors, rather than treating them as simply given. *Mutatis mutandis*, this perspective becomes broadly suggestive of new possibilities for the emerging state system on the European level and its economic nature, through the historical recognition of the contents of its previous counterparts and their transformations.

There are several ways of defining modernity in terms of diverse modes of recognizing of socio-political transformations. The institutionalist way of understanding modernity, as one of them, - a stereo-type for which is expounded in the introduction - provides weak explanatory power for investigating how the development of modern institutions has been intended by major political actors in political crises and for suggesting new institutional models adequate for the current situation. Under such a perspective, the interpretation of what happened and what emerged, are considerably separated from any suggestion of what ought to have happened.

'Modernity refers to a situation in which human beings do not accept any external guarantors, i.e. guarantors that they do not themselves posit, of the certainty of their knowledge, of the viability of their political orders or of the continuity of their selves' (Wagner, 2001b: 4). If I introduce Wagner's understanding of modernity for the Korean context - especially the



contemporary political situation from the 1990s -, Korean political actors can be seen as genuinely located in a modernity in which they could not fully accept any knowledge from others for solving their particular uncertainties and in which they have not yet developed their own solutions for them. Modernity for the Korean context could also be taken to refer to a national situation in the global economy as the context for economic actors, or/and the incomplete national situation in a post-national era for political actors involved in the unification process. While the current socio-economic and political situation in South Korea is underpinned by the complex of actors' interests, which have been developed through the project of state-centered modernization, the agenda for the (re)unification of Korea provocatively requires a reevaluation of all knowledge devoted to building two separate nation-states. Making one's own values and expanding one's influence in order to achieve these objectives, is what is at stake for all political actors in the current situation.

In this thesis I have tried to show the historical aspect of the contemporary Korean polity - which is highlighted in Korean studies as the historical resources of South Korean society - while resisting any dependency on a national form of collective identity. Toward that purpose, I have tried to distantiate myself from some of the conventional wisdom in comparative-historical sociology, found both in political discourse and in the investigation of actual political processes. Firstly, I refute the presupposition of a certain duration of a polity over grand historical time: the polity itself has changed in terms of its members, major political orientations and even its territories. Secondly, I challenge the implicit formulation of asymmetric value judgements between the modern world and its counterpart, as well as a conceptual interpretation of the political characteristics of traditional

society from a modernist stance. Thirdly, I undermine the introduction of macro historical terms for investigating the particular characteristics of the polity and try to escape from the possible deconstruction of political actors into their cultural and circumstantial backgrounds. Fourthly, and most problematically, I deny the applicability of a construction of the single collective subject for representing the polity, favoring its recognition, rather, as akin to narrative subjectivity.

While the historical path has been regarded as the container for a particular political culture in Korean studies (see, Helgesen, 1998 for example), I have indicated in this thesis with several historical examples that the treatment of the Korean polity as a whole is highly problematic. The identification of particular characteristics of a politico-cultural community, which has been the basic theme of comparative historical sociology, deserves a critical evaluation of its contribution to the development of the historical sciences in general. In the same way as grand inquiry in sociology has shifted from (industrial) society to modernity (Wagner, 2000, 2001a), there is no reason to assume that the mode of investigation for comparative historical sociology should be unchangeably based on the comparative identification of the particularities of political and cultural boundaries. Doubting the value of the customized disciplinary boundary seems necessary especially nowadays when new types of boundary politics are suggested and new political actors sought.

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